



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 1 January 2011

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 9th January 2011, 6:00AM: Nehru Zoological Park, Mir Alam.

When not watching the creatures in the cages, one can discover that the zoo is actually a good place for bird watching. The lions' enclosure and the various tanks hold lot of ground and small birds and a number of water birds. Stone Curlews have been known to breed near the Sambar enclosure. One can expect to see a number of migrants too. Earlier trips have given us interesting sightings and observations, and this one may throw a few surprises as well.

This will be a half-day trip. Please carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: LIFE OF BIRDS: *Finding Partners*

Thursday, 20th January 2011, 6PM: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

Colourful, mysterious, noble and intriguing, birds have fascinated us since the dawn of history. With the series *The Life of Birds*, David Attenborough, one of the world's foremost naturalists, hosts an extraordinary exploration into the secret lives of these magnificent creatures.

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 30th January 2011, 6:30AM: ICRISAT, Patancheru.

ICRISAT is one of the richest birding spots around the city and a winter visit here is near mandatory. It boasts of a varied habitat with lakes, fields, ponds, grasslands, etc, and this makes for a varied species list. ICRISAT may give us Wire-tailed Swallows, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters and Yellow-wattled Lapwings, besides the water birds, a few raptors and some bush birds as well. This will be a half-day trip.

This will be a half-day trip. Please carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

***THE BSAP WELCOMES ITS NEW MEMBERS & WISHES ALL
ITS MEMBERS A HAPPY NEW YEAR***

Trip Report – Pocharam Wildlife Sanctuary and Lake – 12th December 2010

Humayun Taher



Red-wattled Lapwing (Photo: Asif Husain)

Having a bad cold can have unfortunate repercussions, not least of which is the alarming possibility of missing out on BSAP field trips. I was determined not to let my nose get the better of me, even though it bore an unpleasant likeness to Niagara Falls in flood! The birds however, did much to cheer me up.

Starting on time with Shafaat Ulla *saab* at the wheel, we made good time on the road, though the inevitable pit stops for *chai* were an inseparable adjunct to a successful day of birding. A couple of our other members joined up with our convoy along the way and the final count of 5 cars took the Pocharam road with a will. Passing through the Narsapur forest along the way, it was thought that it would be impolite of us to not pay our respects to the Narsapur fauna before continuing. So a short 30 minute halt was initiated; providing us the opportunity to say hello to such interesting feathered denizens as the Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos nanus*), sundry Indian Grey Hornbills (*Ocyrceros birostris*) and Tickell's Blue Flycatchers (*Cyornis tickelliae*). Rather reluctantly detaching ourselves from these fascinating chaps, we continued on to Pocharam, finally reaching the Wildlife Sanctuary gates around 10.30 in the morning.

The Forest Department staff had been informed of our imminent arrival and they, undoubtedly, were quite puzzled by the rather motley collection of people who decanted themselves from the cars and immediately started shouldering heavy rucksacks, snapping on weird and dangerous-looking heavy artillery-type lenses on

cameras and generally discussing matters in a language incomprehensible to non-birders. Rallying from this shock they admitted that they were under instructions to open wide the sanctuary gates and allow us entry, which they immediately proceeded to do. So the group of birders filed through into the Pocharam Wildlife Sanctuary – an area that we had not hitherto, been privileged to visit or investigate.

A yearling Sambar stag decided that we were an interesting phenomenon that warranted further investigations. He approached quite close and seemed intent on becoming a member of the Society. The forest staff was not altogether sure that this was such a bright idea. Apparently, the stag, though hand-reared, considered himself to be the self-appointed guardian of the sanctuary and was inclined to be rather cavalier in his treatment of intruders. However, under the watchful bamboo stick of the forest watcher and the baleful eye of the stag, our group proceeded along the trail, taking in such interesting sights as a small group of cheerfully twittering Purple-rumped Sunbirds (*Nectarinia zeylonica*), a few other "Little Brown Jobs" and sundry warblers. An Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*) was less retiring and allowed us a good sighting. Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*) were calling cheerfully around us and even a couple of Oriental White-eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosus*). A couple of Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*) sailed around, hawking insects; one particular chap saw a moth fluttering along. He flew towards the insect with open beak and suddenly the moth was not!

Further along the trail there is a very interesting looking marsh. This looked like a spillover from the Pocharam Lake which had invaded the forest floor. This marsh was a paradise – a fluttering red tail apprised us of the presence of a Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*). A couple of Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) labored up from the water, quacking an alarm. Pied (*Ceryle rudis*), Common (*Alcedo atthis*) and White-throated Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) patrolled the waters, looking for fish and frogs. A solitary wader, in contemplative attitude on the water's edge found his reverie rudely interrupted by a photographer determined to record it for posterity. Being somewhat camera-shy, the wader decided to betake itself elsewhere. In the process, it unfortunately remained unidentified, Moorty's (our indefatigable wader-enthusiast) presence notwithstanding.

Further up, a fluttering in the bushes resolved itself into a female Asian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradise*) playing hide-and-seek, a phenomenon that I was keen to record on film. The sambar stag, however, was still with us and was now quite certain we had evil designs on the sanctuary. Deciding that it was worth a battle with sambar to be able to capture a Paradise flycatcher on film, I crept into the bushes praying to the patron saint of birders to keep the sambar at bay and the Flycatcher from flying. Saint Patrick obliged in the matter of the sambar, but the Paradise Flycatcher was just as camera-shy as the wader and refused to co-operate. But in the process of creeping after the flycatcher, a largish loose-tailed bird in a nearby shrubbery was identified as the Sirkeer Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii*) – a most interesting species in this area, to say the least.



Ultramarine Flycatcher (Photo: Sathya)

However, growling stomachs and the baleful eye of the sambar stag told us that we had overstayed our welcome. So back we went, to meet at the gates, two more extraordinary interesting species of Flycatchers, the Ultramarine (*Ficedula superciliaris*) and the Verditer (*Eumyias thalassina*). These little blue jewels had every camera twisted in their direction and the twitter of their calls was drowned by the clicking of the many shutters. Well content, we repaired to the shelter of the forest department verandah, where hot *chai* and other sundry comestibles were assiduously investigated. Refreshed and, perhaps, just a trifle bloated after this repast, a visit to the lake was finally discussed and found unanimous approval. And so it was off again to the Pocharam Lake.



Bar-headed Geese (Photo: Sathya)

Owing to the rather enthusiastic rain-making efforts of the various rain gods, the lake was overflowing. There was so much water that Pocharam looked like a slightly stunted version of one of the Great Lakes. Of particular interest, though, was a gaggle of about 20 Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*), floating serenely right out in the middle of the sheet of water. This appeared to be all that was on offer in the waterfowl category. A stroll towards the edge of the lake also revealed a pair of Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*), a solitary Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) and a couple of Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*). However, Larks and Pipits on the shores made up for the lack of waterfowl. Red-winged Bushlarks (*Mirafra assamica*) and Rufous-tailed Larks (*Ammomanes phoenicurus*) accompanied the little Ashy-Crowned Sparrow Larks (*Eremopterix grisea*) in their gambols around the sandy areas.



Richard's Pipit (Photo: Asif Husain)

Three species of pipits trotted around and, further along the shore, a pair of Grey-necked Buntings (*Emberiza buchanani*) appeared. This last was a lifer for me and I was lucky to get some fairly decent pictures which enabled us to identify the birds. Another interesting sighting – a pair of Jungle Bush Quail (*Perdica asiatica*); they first gave me a nasty shock by exploding out right under my feet as I was stalking a munia. Leaving the munia to fend for itself, I then went after the quail with grim determination. They exploded out from under my feet again, but I had marked them down now and, after struggling through sundry bushes and donating a few ounces of my flesh and blood to the thorns around the shores of Pocharam, I got my reward of a good look at a quail on the ground. It tried to explode again, but I had already seen it and identified it and, doubtless disappointed that it had not succeeded in dodging me, the bird gave me a sad look and sailed off into the distance.

Just as it disappeared, there was a distinct *peeting* sound and a flock of Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*) came zooming overhead. They were followed by a few Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*), screaming away as usual. I told them that I had nothing to confess and they allowed me to rejoin the rest of the group.



Small Minivet (Photo: Asif Husain)

And so we finally decided that it is time to head back. The weather had become a trifle warm and it was time to retreat before we got cooked. So it was back into the cars and head for home. A great time was had by all and a final tally of the list, along with the birds at Narsapur and those seen en-route came up to the grand figure of 92 species! Some may argue that 92 species is not spectacular for a half-day in three different habitats. I beg to state however, that 92 species is spectacular by ANY standards. Happy birding...!!!

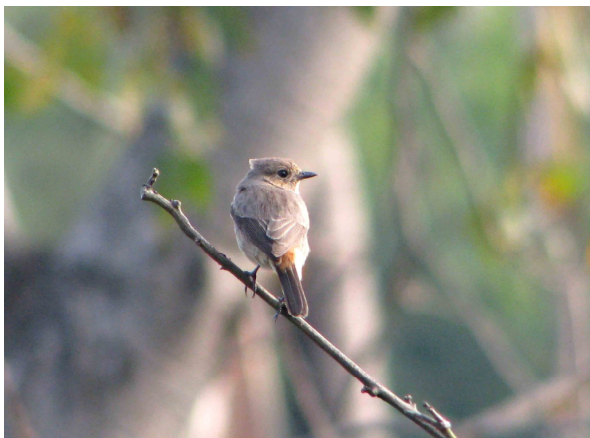
Trip Report – Narsapur, 26th December 2010

Sivaji Anguru



Large Cuckoo-shrike (Photo: Asif Husain)

Birding in Narsapur forest has always fascinated me. It is here that I started learning about birds. In my first trip I sighted a Treepie and told everyone proudly that it was a Yellow-billed Blue Magpie! Later I realized that these birds are found more than thousand kilometers away. I comforted myself by saying that all beginners go through the same problem of wrong identification. With such memories in mind, I could not contain my enthusiasm when BSAP announced a field trip to Narsapur. We all met at Panjagutta and I joined Rajeev Mathew and Vijay Sirdesai. On the way to Narsapur Rajeev narrated very interesting aspects of wildlife, especially tigers and other big game. We all waited impatiently for Shafaat uncle to call us to stop for our usual morning cuppa. When he didn't, we stopped en route, enjoying every sip in that cold winter morning.



Pied Bushchat (Female) (Photo: Asif Husain)

As we parked our vehicles, a Large Cuckooshrike (*Coracina macei*) on a tree-top in front of the temple, enjoying the warmth of the early morning sun, welcomed us. Initially it looked anxious, but when more people started turning up, the bird seemed comfortable, probably after finding some familiar faces! A photo shoot followed for ten minutes and the bird took off. We went into the forest area opposite the temple. Of late, this forest has been witnessing a steady rise in the population of monkeys, which have now outnumbered birds. A solitary birdwatcher will have a testing time dealing these creatures, and in the process, will be deprived of the joy of bird watching.

As we walked into the forest, we heard a lot of bird calls but not one was to be seen. They seemed to be playing hide and seek with us. Thanks to Rajeev I spotted a Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*) and a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*). I was surprised to see how attentive Rajeev and Aasheesh were to the slightest

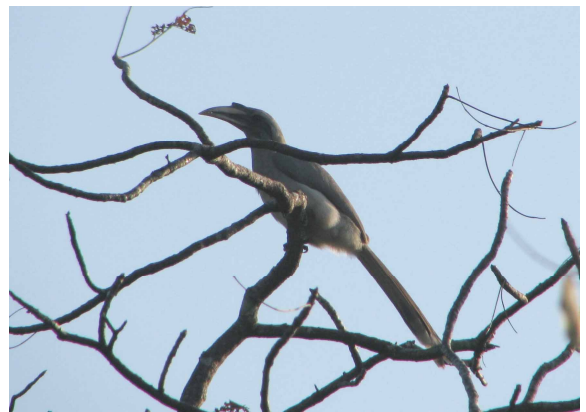
A pair of Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) majestically flew overhead. They have become pretty

movement in the foliage. Expertise comes with experience. They spoke in low voices so as not to startle the birds. When I talk, birds get frightened and fly away!



Chestnut-shouldered Petronia (Photo: Asif Husain)

The group spread in various directions, each one trying its luck. Lots of Chestnut-shouldered Petronia (*Petronia xanthocollis*) were seen calling out and making merry. Meanwhile, Rajeev was lucky to have sighted a Painted Spurfowl (*Galloperdix lunulata*), which the group agreed unanimously, was the bird of the day. I cursed myself for not having been with him, as I was wandering alone hoping to see the Ultramarine Flycatcher. I got neither.



Indian Grey Hornbill (Photo: Asif Husain)

A pair of Yellow-crowned Woodpeckers (*Dendrocopos mahrattensis*), each occupying a branch opposite the other were seen preening their feathers. Vijay was rewarded with the sighting of a Red-throated Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*). We also sighted a Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos nanus*) busy with its drumming session.

common in this area irrespective of the season. We reached a clearing inside the forest. Aasheesh Pittie

informed us that Redstarts and Warblers used to be seen aplenty in yesteryears. Hardly any were to be seen that day. The diversity of species and their numbers have come down drastically according to Aasheesh.



Short-toed Snake Eagle (Photo: Sathya)

As all the members reached the place, a spectacular sight awaited us. Four Short-toed Snake Eagles (*Circaetus gallicus*) were circling in the sky, rising high and picking up the thermals. It was a visual treat which, unfortunately, did not last long as the birds disappeared in different directions.

I was feeling hungry and craving for breakfast but was waiting for someone authoritative to take the call. I didn't have to wait long. Within fifteen minutes the entire group was munching and relishing sandwiches and biscuits. As for my appetite, I leave it to the power of your imagination. There were a few exceptions to this feast. Some decided to continue birding. Sathya was one of them and he came back with excellent photographs of a

The Wildfowl of Hyderabad – The Ground Birds “The Old Shikaree”

In the last column, we spoke about the habits of the Partridge and Sandgrouse clan. These, in their turn, are followed by their slightly larger cousins, the Pheasants, Spurfowl, Junglefowl and Bustards, all of which were represented by at least one species in the old Hyderabad state.

Pheasants

These are some of the most colourful birds in the animal kingdom. A male Monal Pheasant, in flight, looks exactly like a colourful comet. But to see them in flight, or for that matter, even on the ground, we have to travel up

Verditer Flycatcher (*Eumyias thalassina*). But for this and the Red-throated Flycatcher, others in this family disappointed us by not showing up. I hoped to see the Ultramarine Flycatcher, but ended up seeing Tickell's Blue Flycatcher each time.



Verditer Flycatcher (Photo: Sathya)

A walk around the temple and along the stream yielded nothing except a beautiful nest of a House Swift (*Apus affinis*) which was spotted by Mohita, a new member of the group. It was eleven 'o' clock and birding activity gradually subsided. Finally, a Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*) called and bade us goodbye. The group decided to head back towards the city, looking forward to meet at ICRISAT in January. The trip provided a great relief to me from the demanding competitive exams that had been keeping me away from birding for quite some time.

north into the Shivaliks and Himalayan foothills. The pheasants are not birds that are at home in the Deccan regions.

There is, however, one member of this clan that is at home almost anywhere. This is that very colourful bird, to my mind the most splendid of the race – the Indian Peafowl.

So well-known a bird requires no special description; it is easily the most recognisable of the birds of the region. What is perhaps not so well-known is that it was a favourite pursuit of the old *shikarees*. This bird was

frequently found in the cooking pot suspended over the camp-fire of the old-time hunting camps. It has (so we are told) a very delicate taste and was universally esteemed to make that rather strange dish – a mud roast. At one time, I refused to believe that a roast made of a fowl encased in a ball of mud would be palatable. My old compatriot, a gentleman of considerable experience in most matters culinary, soon disabused me of this misguided notion and I have to confess that, since that day I have enjoyed many such epicurean feasts (though now it is with the commoner and more easily procurable *murghee* that I practice my roasting skills).

Peafowl are to be found wherever there is sufficient cover for them to retreat into, and a supply of seeds, berries, grain and the odd grasshopper and locust to sustain them. The cocks, with their long trains are heavy birds and cannot fly very fast. They make up for this, to some extent, by being extremely wary birds and very hard to stalk successfully. To this they owe their safety and the fact that they are still seen in considerable numbers where the conditions are right for their existence.

Spurfowl

There are only two species of Spurfowl that are found in this part of the world: these are the Painted Spurfowl and the Red Spurfowl. Both species make their homes in similar places. What suits them best is a profusion of rather thorny scrub bushes under which to scuttle when danger threatens. They are less given to open areas and are rarely seen in fields, though partridge and quail readily take to these artificial feeding grounds. The Spurfowl are quite happy scratching up the ground on the

edges of forest tracks and eking out a fair living on grass seeds, occasional berries and the odd beetle or grub.

Both species are extraordinarily colourful birds. The Painted Spurfowl, indeed can give many of the northern pheasants a very good run for their money in the matter of looks. While it is true that they have not the metallic finish that most pheasants seem to delight in sporting, their plumage is still sufficiently attractive as to make the novice wonder why it is that they are not easier to spot on the ground. I remember that I myself was once inclined to this way of thinking, until I was completely outwitted by a most cunning Painted Spurfowl that waited for me almost to step on it, before it laboured up on heavily flapping wings and fled; giving me a most unpleasant shock in the process. I swore I would never again be taken in by such a performance and, mouthing words of pungent nature, proceeded on my way with a sharp eye out for my erstwhile antagonist. Ten minutes later I was again left fighting for breath when the performance was repeated. I decided then that never again would I underestimate the camouflaging properties of this seemingly stunning dress that the birds wear.

On the wing, these birds are not very fast and, for this reason, were reckoned as easy game for the tyro to wing-shooting. They were also termed as being eminently suited for the table and were, therefore, much in demand. Owing, however, to their secretive ways, no large bags of these birds were obtained. The odd brace was all that came the way of the old *shikarees* but for all that, the birds continued to be favourites of the tribe of the Game Birds of Hyderabad!

Bird Humour

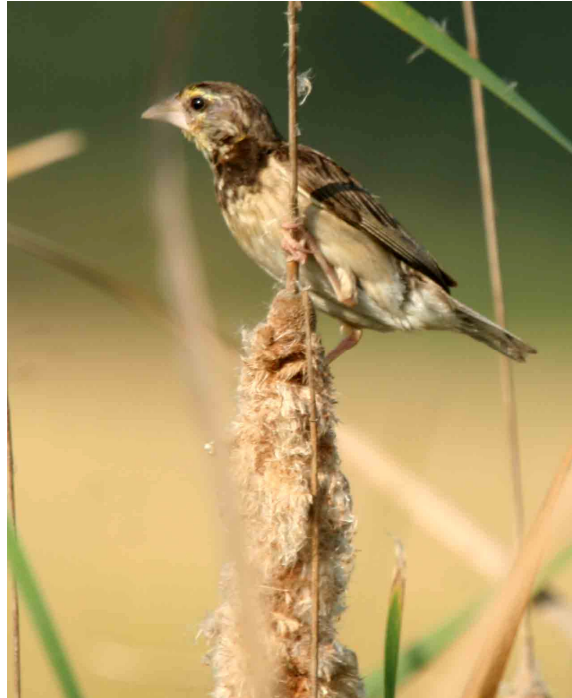


(From The Times of India, 15-10-2010)

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Black-breasted Weaver (*Ploceus benghalensis*)



Black-breasted Weaver

(Manjeera Barrage, 28-11-2010)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Ploceidae
Genus: *Ploceus*
Species: *P. benghalensis*
Size: 15 cm

Description: The breeding male has a brilliant golden-yellow crown, fulvous-to-white throat and a black breast-band separating it from fulvous-white underparts. One variant has white ear-coverts. In non-breeding and female plumages, the crown is brown like the rest of the upperparts; the black breast-band may be broken by whitish fringes or limited to small patches at the sides, and may show diffuse streaking on lower breast and flanks. It has a prominent supercilium and narrow, pale yellow moustachial streaks; the nape and rump are indistinctly streaked and contrast heavily with heavily streaked mantle and back.

Behaviour: The Black-breasted Weaver is typically seen in small-to-medium sized (and sometimes large) flocks around cultivation, tall moist grasslands, and around reedy margins of tanks and *jheels*. It is polygynous and colonial. In courtship, it bows low before a female, presenting its golden crown to her; flaps wings slowly and softly sings *tsi-tsisik-tsisik-tsik-tsik*, somewhat like the chirp of a cricket. It is seen across northern India east to the North-eastern states, and in patchy distribution south up to Kutch, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh; also seen in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Nesting: The Black-breasted Weaver nests from June to September. The nest is similar to the Baya's, though smaller and normally with shorter entrance tubes; built in reed-beds, incorporating some of the reeds into the dome as support. The nests are built singly or in groups of 4-5, and sometimes in larger colonies. The clutch consists of 3-4 white eggs.

Local name: It is known as 'sarbo baya' in Hindi, 'nallagontu pichuka' in Telugu and 'shor baya' or 'kantawala baya' in Bengali.

For Private Circulation Only

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 2 February 2011

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 13th February 2011, 6:00AM: GMR Hyderabad International Airport.

GMR Hyderabad International Airport is a green-field airport spread across 5500 acres. Only half of the area has been developed. The rest has been left untouched for the 2nd and 3rd phase of development. Shrub forest and wetlands comprise this area and it is rich in avifauna as well as butterflies. Peafowl, Swifts, Swallows, Bee-eaters, Herons, Ducks and many more abound in this area.

All members are requested to follow the route map that is attached. One has to take a left after the second rotary and park the vehicles at the APSRTC bus shelter.

This will be a half-day trip. Please carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to coordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302). Mr. Ushodayan, who has organized this trip for us, can be reached on the following numbers - 9949297898/9247087620.

INDOOR MEETING: RADIOTELEMETRY MONITORING OF KING COBRAS: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSERVATION ECOLOGY

Thursday, 24th February 2011, 6PM: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

Radio telemetry has undoubtedly enhanced our understanding of the behavior and habitat of easily observable animals such as birds, and has arguably revolutionized our ability to study the more secretive ones, such as snakes. Radio transmitters, recently implanted in five King Cobras by scientists at the Agumbe Rainforest Research Station in Karnataka, have provided valuable information on their home range, habitat use, diet, foraging behavior and breeding ecology.

Sreekar Rachakonda, a Research Associate at the Agumbe Rainforest Research Station and an avid birder, will briefly present this information and highlight the management implications of such research efforts towards the conservation of rainforests in India.

Trip Report – Nehru Zoological Park – 9th January 2011

Nilay Raha



Indian Peafowl (Photo: G Samuel Sukumar)

Trips to Nehru Zoological Park have been very fruitful for me. I have birded here four times in the last one year and each time, be it winter or summer, this place has produced a large number bird species and this has left a novice birder like me, gratified. With the hope that I would have the same luck this trip, as well as make some new friends, I reached the Zoo at 5:45 am with Mr. Sharad.

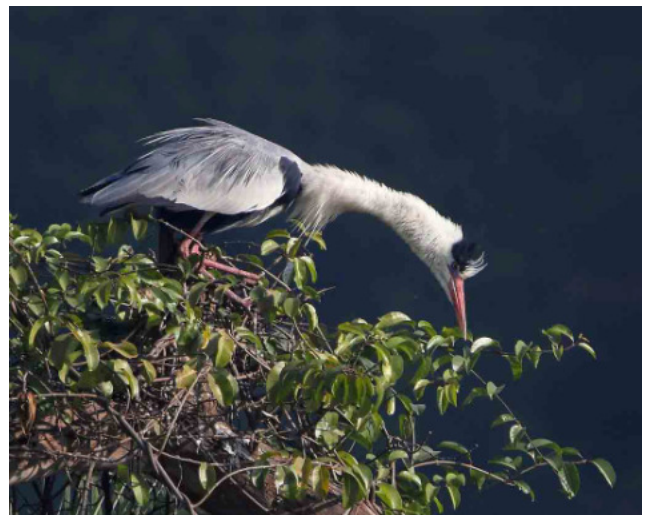
This Zoo is one of the largest in India. It is located near Mir Alam Tank in Hyderabad and extends over 380 acres and houses nearly 100 species of birds, animals and reptiles.

By 6:30 all the group members had gathered at the entrance and we all started birding. As expected, the day was fruitful, yielding a tally of 65 birds, which included few migrants and my bird of the day.

The first birds to greet us in the New Year were our commons which included the Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) and White-headed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*). Numerous Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) were flying above us, calling together, as if to attract our attention. Ahead of the tortoise enclosure, we heard the most melodious bird call. It had a different note altogether. We realized that it was the call of a small bird. Ms. Anjali and I took some time to trace the bird which was atop a tall tree and found that it was a Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*).

During one of my earlier trips, I had spotted the Kingfisher and the Golden Oriole near the White Tiger's

enclosure. For a while I saw nothing. However, near the Royal Bengal Tiger's cage I saw a female Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*) atop a small dry tree. Here we also saw the Oriental Magpie-robin (*Copsychus saularis*) - the sweet singer - searching for his food early in the morning.



Grey Heron (Photo: Ajith Devakumar)

Further ahead we saw a lone Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) and some Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*) standing near the reeds, their necks tucked in - may be due to the cold.



Black-crowned Night Heron (Juvenile)
(Photo: Ajith Devakumar)

Further down there was another small marshy area, hidden from the walkway by some trees. On a big tree we saw a Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), 5-6 Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*), few Grey Herons and some Black-crowned Night-herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), all roosting quietly.



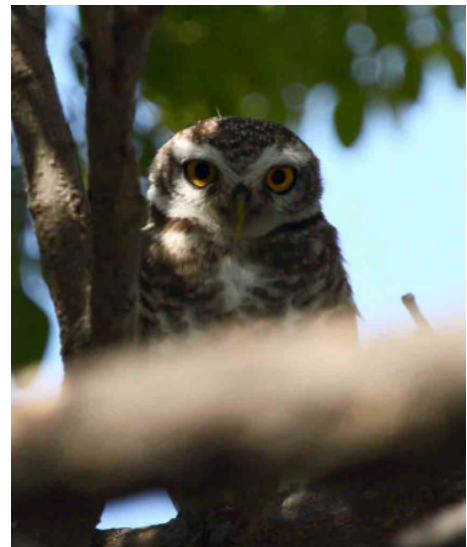
Common Kingfisher (Photo: Ajith Devakumar)

In the reeds we also saw a Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) which was resting for over five minutes as if not intending to fish in the first few hours of the day. I was keeping my eyes peeled hoping to view the Black Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*) in this region. This bird was the highlight of BSAP's last trip to the zoo in April 2010. Fortunately I was able to spot this bird as it flew from a tree into the reeds, thereby, just giving us a feel of its presence.



Grey Wagtail (Photo: G Samuel Sukumar)

We came back to the main pathway and walked further on. On a small tree nearby we saw a male Golden Oriole, camouflaged in the dense branches of the trees. Further ahead there was a big plain ground on the right side of the path where the Spotted Deer were put up. On the ground, we saw a White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) and a pair of Wagtails. I felt they were Large Pied Wagtails but Ms. Anjali informed me that they were Grey Wagtails (*Motacilla cinerea*)—our first migratory bird of the day. I carefully observed their gorgeous combination of grey and yellow. While I was studying this bird, other group members were trying hard to identify what turned out to be the small Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*) as it was hiding amidst the tree branches.



Spotted Owlet (Photo: Ajith Devakumar)

While scanning the branches to study the bird properly, one of the group members saw a Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*). I was so excited that I focussed entirely on the owlet. This was the bird I had been trying to spot from the last one year. But unfortunately, its face was hidden by thick branches and was not visible. I was really down as I was unable to see its large round head with staring yellow eyes. However, on the same tree we saw a Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*) vanishing into the braches before settling down.



White Wagtail (Photo: Ajith Devakumar)

On the plain land far away from us, the experienced members were trying to identify another Wagtail. They tried to observe its features - the beak, the body, the legs, the black strip on the throat and, most importantly, the light-black strip over the cheeks and supercilium. The members cross-checked the features in a field guide and confirmed that it was the White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*). We had our eyes glued to this second migrant for five whole minutes to our hearts content.

After a little while we all got a chance to study the different features of both, the Large Pied (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) and White Wagtail on a single canvas. We spotted a few Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) in flight while they were making loud demanding calls of 'did you do it' 'did you do it' 'did you do it'. We then spotted five Pied Starlings (*Sturnus contra*) sitting on a tree far away from us. Meanwhile a Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) was spotted landing on the plain ground.

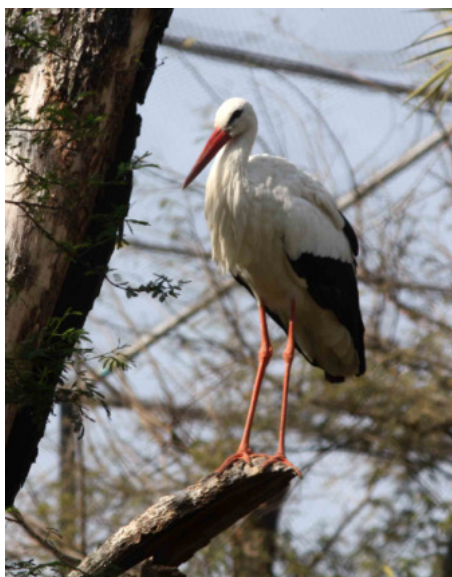
On the opposite side of the plain ground, in a tall tree top we spotted a Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) hopping from one branch to another. I was very happy to see it after a long gap. On the branch of

the same tree we saw a Plain Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum concolor*). We walked down a little further and reached the elephant's grazing area. Here we birded for at least 30 mins. Some of the interesting birds seen over here were Brahminy Starlings (*Sturnus pagodarum*), busy Small Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*), a small flock of Indian Silverbills (*Lonchura malabarica*), Pied Buschat (*Saxicola caprata*), Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*), Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*), Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*), a lone Grey Partridge (*Francolinus pondicerianus*), Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*), Common Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*), White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) and two Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*). While viewing all these birds, Asian Palm-swifts (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*), House Swifts (*Apus affinis*) and Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) glided above us.



Indian Robin (Female) (Photo: Ajith Devakumar)

Further ahead there was a big lake on the right side of the path. Here we saw a crocodile and few tortoises sunning themselves on the bank. The bank has slender reeds and we were hoping to see some Warblers. We spotted a bird in the reeds and Mr. Sharad identified it as the Clamorous Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*). Here we also saw a lone Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*) and a Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*). Meanwhile we noticed three pairs of resident Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) circling above the lake. We then spotted ten to twelve Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) on the opposite shore. The reflection of their bodies on the water was really beautiful!



Asian Openbill (Photo: G Samuel Sukumar)

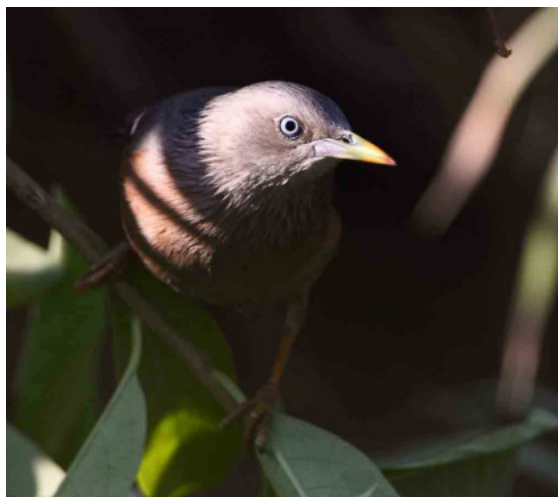
There were a few trees in the middle of the lake where Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) were roosting with two to three juveniles. Through the spotting scope I observed the red eyes of the juveniles which distinguish them from India Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*). In the same tree we spotted a lone Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*) and the senior birders explained the uniqueness of the triangular patch of crimson warts on the crown and the white shoulder patch on the black body. This information was helpful for me and would make it easy in distinguishing it from the Glossy Ibis. Here we also saw 2-3 Grey Herons, Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Median Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) and Asian Openbill Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*).



Common Sandpiper (Photo: Ajith Devakumar)

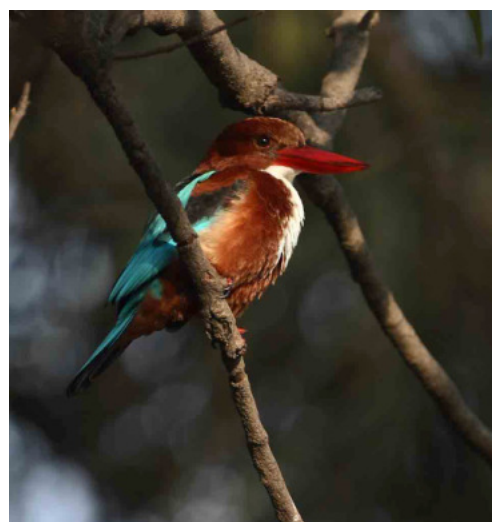
We also saw a Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) flying above the lake and bobbing its tails up and down. I deviated from bird watching for a while and noted down the names and contact details of the trip attendees. Walking further, on the opposite side of the Giraffe Park, we saw all the three Wagtails - Pied, Grey and White at

one place. Novice birders got an opportunity to study their features very closely. Beside the Wagtails, we saw a Common Kingfisher on a dry tree branch less than ten feet from us! It was proudly showing off its amazing deep purplish-blue colour above and orange-yellow colour below. It successfully fished in the small canal. We were thrilled to see this.



Chestnut-tailed Starling (Photo: Ajith Devakumar)

While I was looking at the Common Kingfisher, some of the group members were watching another bird which was resting on a tree. On being told that it was a Spotted Owlet, I was overjoyed. This time I watched the owlet to my heart's content. I promptly christened it the "Bird of the Day". In a small pond we saw a Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) and a Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*). We also saw a White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) on a treetop.



White-breasted Kingfisher (Photo: Ajith Devakumar)

Like all good things, this trip also came to an end. After a relaxing breakfast, we walked towards the exit gate and on the way met the Curator and the Director of the zoo. We were lucky to get an invitation from them to view a pair of Black Swans which a trader had got from Australia. They were taken out of the cage and put into a small pond in order to assess their state of health. Their necks were tall and erect and we all admired their beauty to our hearts content. The pair enjoyed swimming for a while before they were caged again until the zoo authorities could take a decision on the future course of action. Just as Mr. Minhaj expressed his disappointment at not sighting any raptor other than the Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*), within seconds we spotted a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) settling down on a big tree. With these sightings another wonderful birding trip concluded, keeping hope alive for another fulfilling day of birding in the zoo.



Green Bee-eater (Photo: Ajith Devakumar)

Trip Report – ICRISAT, 30th January 2011

Sagarika Melkote



Photo: Umesh Mani

The unusually chilly winter that Hyderabad had been experiencing, seemed to be on its way out. The sun was out by the time we got to ICRISAT even though it was just 7am. The turnout for the trip was also large – approximately 50 people. After the initial meet and greet, we were met at the gates by Tom Hash, who had very kindly offered to be our host at ICRISAT and from there on, our mode of transport was the ICRISAT bus, again organized by Tom.

ICRISAT has an amazing diversity of habitat – from water bodies to dumps of thicket to tall grass to flat lands.

Just as the bus started, we saw an Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) – our first bird of the day. As we proceeded along the road, we spotted Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), White-throated Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) and Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*).

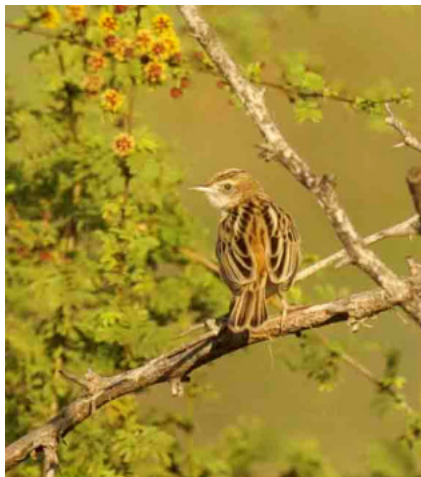
While these birds may not be exactly uncommon, what was heart-warming was the sheer numbers in which they were present, thus proving that the carefully-preserved habitat was perhaps the most important reason why these birds seemed to be happily thriving.

A Black-naped Hare scurried along, frightened by the noise of the bus.....Our first halt inside ICRISAT was by the edge of a semi-forested area, where we alighted and split up to go our separate ways, after Tom warned us to watch our step. Apparently, the area is known for its Russell's Vipers!! In any case, I was pretty sure all the snakes would have been scared away as our feet encountered dry leaves!



Rosy Starling (Photo: Ismail Shariff)

A lone Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) on an almost-bare tree greeted us. Green Bee-eaters zipped past by the dozen. One particular patch of area had Rosy Starlings (*Sturnus roseus*) in some abundance.



Zitting Cisticola (Photo: Ismail Shariff)

Some distance away, we spotted Eurasian Collared Doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*), Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Brown Shrikes (*Lanius cristatus*), a Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*), Bay-backed Shrikes (*Lanius vittatus*) (identified after a short debate between Shivaji and Humayan!) and Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*).

A well-spent hour or so here, and then the consensus was to take a breather for breakfast. Tom took us to one of the many water bodies within ICRISAT.



Indian Golden Oriole (Photo: Asif Husain)

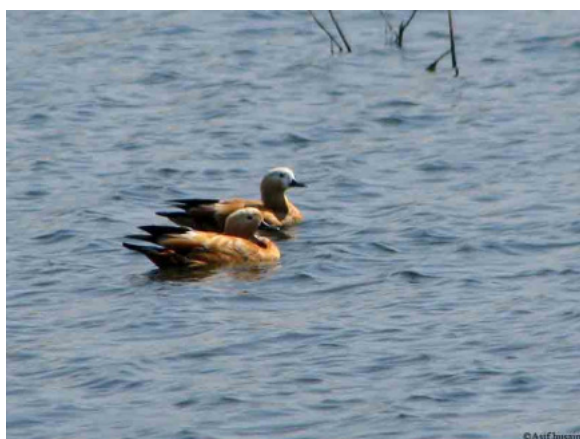
The highlight of the day for me, personally, was the sighting of a Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelicanus philippensis*), swimming in blissful solitude. The bird, although far away, stayed long enough on the water to satisfy all of us. White-browed Wagtails (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) darted past, showing little interest in us intruders.



Northern Shoveler (Photo: Asif Husain)

Moving to a second water-body after breakfast proved to be a feast for the eyes. The area was unbelievable - Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) and Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*) daunted us with their sheer numbers. I counted close to a dozen Painted Storks on a single tree and an equal number of Grey Herons on a little island-like patch on the lake. Black-headed Ibises (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) came in a close second.

Flocks of Northern Shovelers (*Anas clypeata*), some Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), a couple of Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*) and Gadwalls (*Anas strepera*) took centre stage on the water. Various Egrets and Indian Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*) were present and a diffident Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) also made a quick appearance. The call of the Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) could be heard loud and clear all the while.



Ruddy Shelduck (Photo: Asif Husain)

Walking along the edge of the lake, we spotted a small flock of Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*). A Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) suddenly appeared and perched on a nearby telegraph wire, long enough to satisfy the photographers. Another interesting sight was a pair of Grey Herons with young, still in the nest.



Grey Heron (Photo: Asif Husain)

It was heart-warming to see these birds thriving, the credit for which goes to the effort made to conserve their habitat. The birds seemed happily unaware of the presence of humans close by and were engrossed in their routine!

The Wildfowl of Hyderabad – The Ground Birds

“The Old Shikaræ”

The last of the birds of the Ground Birds Tribe are the Junglefowl and Bustards, both of them very eminently suited for *shikar* purposes and equally esteemed for the table. They share one other, rather dubious distinction, and that is their increased rarity in these days of greater awareness of the heinousness of *shikar*.

Junglefowl

As we drove further, we passed some toddy trees. Asian Palm Swifts (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*) swooped past. Tom pointed out that he had spotted Grey Hornbills in the past in the same place. A stop at yet another lake yielded Common Coots (*Fulica atra*), Common Moorhens (*Gallinula chloropus*) and a pair of beautiful Bronze-winged Jacanas (*Metopidius indicus*). On land, a Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) alighted – even with binoculars, it was difficult to spot the bird – the camouflage was so effective. A short walk along the lake, we spotted Common Stonechats (*Saxicola torquata*) and Indian Robins (*Saxicoloides fulicata*).

As the sun rose further in the sky, it began to get progressively hotter. Before winding up for the day, the group went over the list of birds spotted and thanked Tom for being such a wonderful host. As we made our way towards the exit, Umesh pointed out a group of about 7 to 8 Red-wattled Lapwings holding a conference in the shade of a short tree along the road side!

It was a group of hot, hungry but happy birders that made its way out of the ICRISAT gates on the afternoon of January 30th 2011 – another immensely satisfying birding trip concluded.

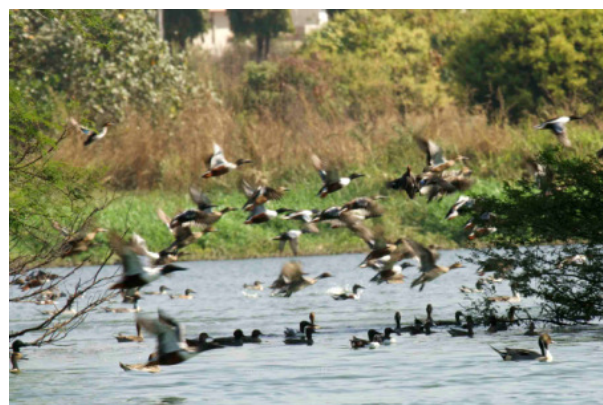


Photo: Ismail Shariff

Only one species was regularly found in the old Hyderabad state. This was the common Grey Junglefowl. The Red Junglefowl, that wild progenitor of the domestic *murghee*, was sometimes encountered in the Sal belts near Berar (adjoining the Central Provinces), but it was never very frequently encountered. The Red Junglefowl is almost universally associated with Sal forests and it is here that the old *shikarees* sought it.

The Grey Junglefowl, on the other hand, is more suited to the trap formation of the Deccan and was, therefore, frequently encountered by the nimrod.

The Grey Junglefowl is, to my mind, a far more handsome bird than the Red. The latter is patently obvious as a relative of the village *murghee* – from the fact that the plumage has changed little in the transition. The Grey, on the other hand, through not being domesticated, retains its very handsome wild plumage. They are frequently encountered even today in scrub jungle, where they will most frequently be seen scuttling into cover. A covey consists generally of a cock and half-a-dozen hens, with maybe a train of chicks in tow. The cock frequently will be heard issuing forth his crowing challenge to rivals to keep their distance. This warning notwithstanding, coveys often forgo their distance when food is readily available. Grass seeds, spilled grain, berries and nuts form the bulk of their sustenance and, through this clean feeding habit, the birds were considered to have a remarkably delectable flavour and were eagerly pursued.

Old-time *shikarees* have commented on the difficulties of bringing Grey Junglefowl to bag. This difficulty is, in no way, exaggerated. It is very difficult to take them unawares and their habit of shooting straight into the air and then dropping down almost at once makes them a severe test of wing-shooting skills. In eighteen years of *shikar*, I have only bagged twenty Grey Junglefowl. It speaks much of their skills on the wing and their wary nature.

Bustard

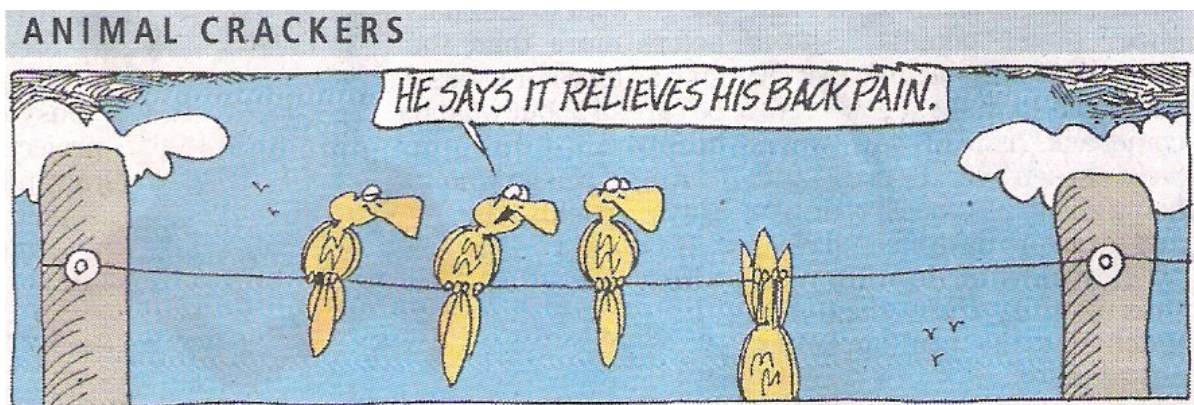
These, the largest (and now the rarest) of the Game Birds, are represented in the Hyderabad state by two members, the Great Indian Bustard and the smaller, Lesser Florican. Both species inhabit open grasslands with scattered

croplands, where they subsist on seeds, grain, berries, locusts and the odd lizards and skinks. The Great Indian Bustard is reputed to kill snakes but whether this is a means of sustenance or an elimination of threat to the ground nest of the birds is a question that has still not been decided by the scientists.

Both species, through sharing the same type of habitat, also have similar habits. The Great Indian Bustard perhaps holds an advantage in that, being a much bigger bird, it has a corresponding lack of enemies in the wild – the chief wild predators of the grasslands being the Wolf and the Fox. The wolf would be a match for any Bustard, large or small. But the Indian Fox would give an adult male Great Indian Bustard a fairly wide berth. They can peck very hard, I am told.

Unfortunately for these birds, they were considered the cream of the Game Birds. Their flesh was considered most delicious and they were relentlessly pursued. So much so, both species are now seriously threatened throughout their range and now they are distinguished as being important members of the Red Data list published by international conservation organizations. In early days, we young *shikarees* sometimes spotted the odd bird close to Hyderabad (where the birds used to be found in the days of long-ago). Once, a friend of ours found a Lesser Florican in a field of recently-planted corn close to Hyderabad city. It made a delicious roast, with tiny boiled potatoes and a liberal application of exotic spices! Alas, those happy days are long-gone now and the birds no longer come towards Hyderabad; nor do they figure on menus (at least not on the menus planned by me or my erstwhile *shikar* compatriots). This strict protection, both from the general public and the poacher, is very necessary for these are the rarest of the tribes of the Game Birds of Hyderabad!

Bird Humour



(From The Times of India, 1-11-2010)

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*)



Spot-billed Pelican

(Nelapattu WLS, 23-12-2010)

Order: Pelecaniformes
Family: Pelecanidae
Genus: *Pelecanus*
Species: *P. philippensis*
Size: 150 cm

Description: The Spot-billed Pelican is a large, squat water bird, mainly grey and greyish-white, with a brown nuchal crest which is usually visible even in young birds. It has stout, sturdy legs with large webbed feet, and a very large, heavy, flattened, pinkish bill which is throughout underhung by an elastic pouch of dull pinkish-purplish skin. Some diagnostic features are the large blue-black spots along upper mandible edges (except juveniles), blackish wing quills, and a greyish-brown tail. There is little contrast between wing-coverts and flight feathers, but paler greater coverts create a distinct central panel. The adult breeding bird has a cinnamon-pink rump, underwing and undertail coverts; head and neck is greyish; there is purplish skin in front of the eye, and the pouch is pink to dull purple blotched with black. The adult non-breeding bird is dirtier greyish-white. The Immature has variable grey-brown markings on upperparts. The Juvenile has a brownish head and neck, and brown mantle, upperwing coverts and flight feathers. The spotting on bill is initially absent and, as it develops, still indistinct up to around 12 months. The sexes are alike.

Behaviour: The Spot-billed Pelican is typically seen in flocks at large lakes, reservoirs, *jheels* and rivers as well as in coastal waters. Flocks may also be seen on mudbanks, preening themselves. The birds fish by collective effort, swimming in a semi-circle, and driving the fish before them into the shallows with vigorous splashing of their wings, where they scoop them up, using their pouches like a landing net. Given their large size, they take off from the water with relatively less effort and, once airborne, fly strongly with rhythmic wing-beats, with their heads drawn in between their shoulders. Around mid-day, they can often be seen soaring in circles at great heights in the company of storks. The Spot-billed Pelican is seen in well-watered areas throughout India; also in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. They are resident but may migrate locally.

Nesting: The Spot-billed Pelican nests from November to April. The nest is a large platform on tall trees and palms; there may be several nests in the same tree. They nest gregariously, with the nesting colony often covering large areas; other species like Asian Openbills and Black-headed Ibises may also nest or roost on the same trees. Eggs are 3 chalky-white, which become quite dirty as incubation progresses.

Local name: It is known as 'hawasil' in Hindi and 'chikabatu' in Telugu.

For Private Circulation Only

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 2 February 2011 (Special Issue)

Special Report
BSAP Birding Camp at Goa, 23rd – 26th September 2010



Day-1
Abhinava Kidambi

After a long, overnight bus journey from Hyderabad, we reached Goa at about 10 in the morning. Our day started out well. We did a lot of birding en route to the hotel. From the car we first saw a few Brahminy Kites (*Haliastur indus*) and Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) looking for breakfast. As we were moving towards our hotel we spotted 2 Asian Openbills (*Anastomus oscitans*). Driving past numerous water bodies, which are abundant in Goa, we saw Cattle Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*) and an Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*), and also a couple of Purple Herons (*Ardea purpurea*) far behind.

We reached the hotel after an Udupi breakfast and checked into our respective rooms. Umesh uncle and I decided to check out the view from the balcony. We saw a Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus atrogularis*) nesting in a bush just outside our balcony, and a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*).



Common Tailorbird (Photo: Umesh Mari)

Around noon we left our hotel and drove to the Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary, which is in south Goa. While some uncles were organizing a few guides, we decided to explore the surroundings, where, with great difficulty, we spotted a Black-hooded Oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*). As we moved into the forest with our guides we hoped to find a few rare birds like Trogons and Bluebirds. Unfortunately, our guides only knew routes around the forest and had little knowledge of birding.

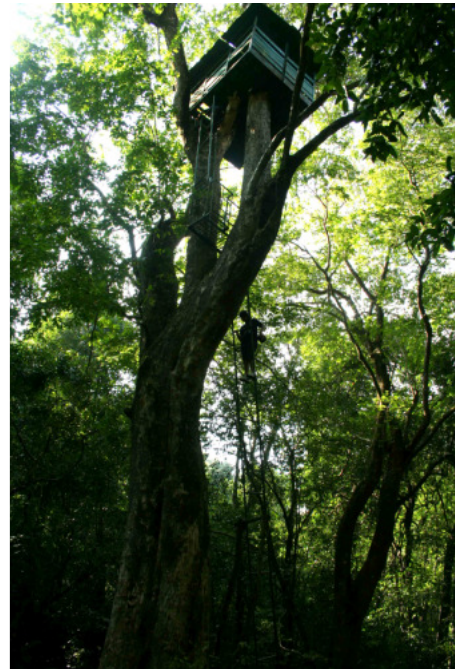
After a long wait we spotted a Crimson Sunbird (*Aethopyga siparaja*). A little ahead we saw an interesting bird - a Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*) and right after that, a Malabar Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros griseus*). We also saw some very interesting-looking flowers, mushrooms, etc on the way.



(Photo: Umesh Mani)

When we reached the watch tower, Sharada, my father Ramesh and I decided to climb it. From there we had an

eagle's view of what was going on below us. We could see a stream flowing on one side and a small pond on the other.



(Photo: Umesh Mani)

It was finally time to come down and head back to the hotel. We all slept on the journey back and relaxed on the beach. After a good dinner we all went to sleep, hoping to spot more birds the next day.

Day-2

NETRAVALI WLS – A Sight To Behold!

J V D Moorty

Margao, Quepem, Tilamol, Zambaulim, Rivona – names that conjure up a thousand picturesque images – were but a few towns we drove through on our way to Netravali Wildlife Sanctuary that is situated in the Sanguem Taluka in South-eastern Goa. The government of Goa dedared Netravali as a wildlife sanctuary to protect its Western Ghat ranges. The sanctuary covering an area of 211 sq. km. is connected to the Madei Wildlife Sanctuary and together they cover an area of 420 sq. km. The sanctuary is an extremely significant source of fresh water and is named after the Netravali or Neturlim, which is an important tributary of the Zuari River. One can also see a high range of mountains here which the local habitants consider

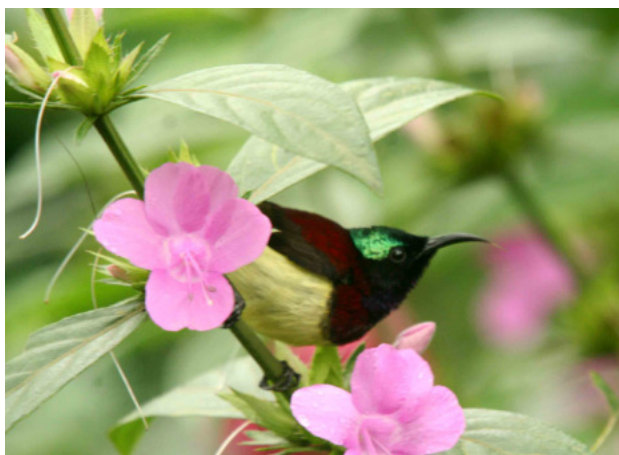
sacred and which are of socio-cultural importance to them. To the north of the Netravali wildlife sanctuary lie the Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary and the Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary that we visited on the first day.

Goa is one of the few states which have maximum area under legal protection with as many as six Wildlife Sanctuaries. Four of these are a part of the Sahyadris, a biodiversity hotspot, thus, making Goa the only state in India to protect the complete Western Ghat section within the state. Endemism is very high in this area, with 7 species recorded from Goa of the 16 endemics in the Western Ghats.



Green Imperial Pigeon (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Waking up to the sound of pattering rain, especially when time is at a premium, is not the kind of day one looks forward to as a birder. But get ready we did and at about 6am we were off, fizzing our way through light rain. An hour and a half later found us driving through the village of Neturlim and climbing up the hills. Following the handwritten notes given by Mr. Heinz Lainer, we drove up the ghat road past the dirt track leading to Tudav hamlet, where we disembarked and began birding our way up the slopes. It was amusing to see each other balancing an umbrella in the crook of one arm whilst adjusting binoculars and cameras with the other, ensuring that neither the equipment nor the person got wet, and trying to identify the bird calls simultaneously!



Small Sunbird (Photo: Umesh Mani)

A Small Sunbird (*Nectarina minima*) held our focus as it flitted through the branches of a tree in the distance, unmindful of the light drizzle. The vast expanse of green forest stretched into the hazy mists, and wisps of fog hung upon trees through which a few bird calls could be heard. With rain refusing to yield ground, we got into the vehicles and drove towards the hamlet of Vælem that is at a height of approximately 550 metres. This proved to be a wise

decision, for as we approached the hamlet the clouds began to thin out and the drizzle turned into mist and fog, which is a sign that the clouds would soon disperse.



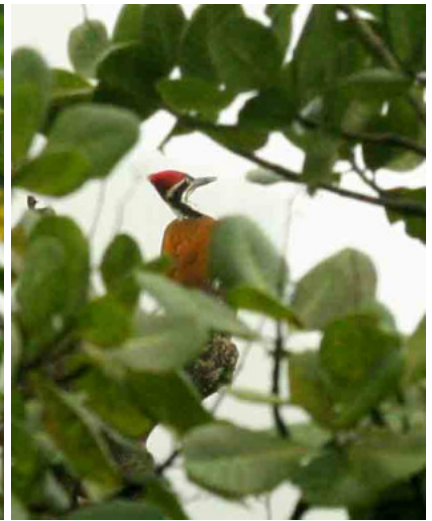
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

A blue flycatcher-like bird – possibly the Ultramarine Flycatcher (*Ficedula superciliaris*) flashed across the road promising some good birding. One of the endemics, the Yellow-browed Bulbul (*Iole indica*), blessed us with a few fleeting glimpses before moving on.



Yellow-browed Bulbul (Photo: Umesh Mani)

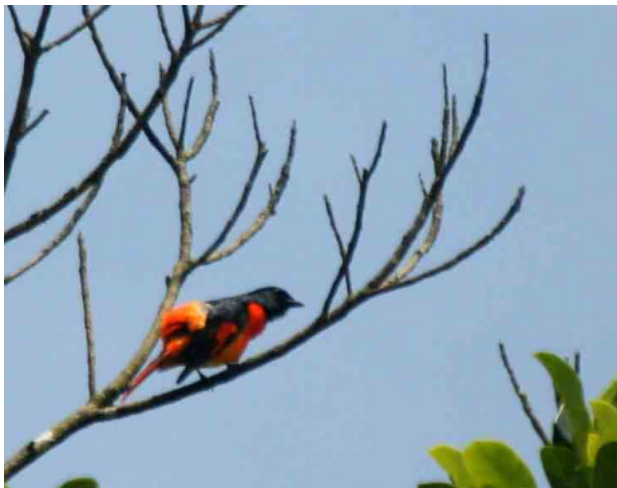
A Golden-fronted Leafbird (*Chloropsis aurifrons*) on a tree behind the row of houses in the hamlet provided perfect photo opportunity to the camera-toting birders. The morning growing older and no breakfast meant that a request be made to one of the inhabitants, which saw her rustle up breakfast for 15 starving birders with appetites to match. Birding around breakfast was just as rewarding and entertaining with House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) – a rarity for us here – flitting in and out of the hedges. Crested Treeswifts (*Hemiprocne coronata*) stitched patterns overhead, patterns interspersed with crisscrossing of the House Swifts (*Apus affinis*) and the Asian Palm Swifts (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*).



Crested Tree-swift, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Greater Flameback (Female) (Photos: Umesh Mani)

We then proceeded to walk on a dirt track towards the Salgini hamlet. But the warning that leeches abound on this route, took the gloss off the birding. Yours truly did manage to pick up three though!! A Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*) playing peek-a-boo had all of us aflame with the clickers vying with the twitchers to spot it. A White-cheeked Barbet (*Megalaima viridis*) vocalized his observations about her behaviour to the rest of the forest denizens. A Red Spurfowl (*Galloperdix spadicea*) skulked in the undergrowth calling loudly. In the distance an Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) was just as merry. Not to be outdone a Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*) announced his presence in the undergrowth as well.

With lunch approaching we drove down to the village of Neturlim. The previous days' experience of having run over a snake (road kill) had us asking the drivers, who had no absolutely no idea of what we were up to, to slow down while driving through the forest. The meal offered by the family-run 'hotel' in the tiny hamlet was reasonable, but not quite the charges. Goans surely know on which side their tourists are buttered!



Scarlet Minivet (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Alexandrine Parakeet (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Kentish Plover (Photo: Asif Husain)

Later in the afternoon we went over to Baga Beach, as it was said to be a good site as mentioned in the book by Krys Kazmierczak. It was a long drive and we reached Baga Beach with about an hour to go for sunset. The river was at low tide and exposed its banks where Kentish

Plovers (*Charadrius alexandrinus*), Little Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius dubius*), Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*) and Little Stints (*Calidris minuta*) were waltzing their way on the sandbanks gathering their evening feed. The felds alongside the river yielded a solemn Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*) and a row of Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) dotting the fence posts. Two Yellow Bitterns (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) were stalking through the low grassy reeds necks fully outstretched. Alexandrine Parakeets (*Psittacula eupatria*) were stitching holes in topless palm trees. A kingfisher on a wire had us hoping that we had got the Blue-eared, but unfortunately it turned out to be the Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*).

With the sun setting over the Arabian Sea, we watched the holiday-makers on the beach enjoying themselves on water scooters and parasailing, children building sand dunes and headed towards the vehicle to head back to our hotel on Colva Beach. The morrow with Heinz Lainer promised to be good and we had to be up and ready to meet him by 7 am.



(Photo: Unesh Mani)

Day-3
WADER FESTIVAL!
Surekha Aitabathula



Sand Plover flock (Photo: Umesh Mani)

What would you say to Mr Heinz Lainer, an avid birdwatcher from Germany who has made Goa his home for the last 35 years? Or to Mr Gordon Frost, also an avid bird watcher from the UK, who has been living in Goa since the last 15 years? I would say thank you ever so much for settling down to bird watching in my country.

On day three of our fabulous trip to Goa, we were privileged to meet the extremely knowledgeable birders, Mr Lainer and Mr Frost who took us on a guided birding trip to Morjim Beach and Carambolim Creek.



Lesser Sand Plover (Photo: Umesh Mani)

We were like the cats that got their cream in the first leg of our tour at Morjim beach. It was a major visual feast. As we arrived there, we saw a large flock of Sand Plovers in the sand and several Gulls at the edge of the sea! I stopped right in my tracks and stared awestruck at about 200 Lesser Sand Plovers (*Charadrius mongolus*). This was a personal record! For the first time in my life I saw a flock of over 200 birds of the same species.

Barely able to contain my thrill, I rubbed my hands in glee and made my newfound binoculars work overtime! They looked like a now-stationary-and-now-mobile sandy grey-brown carpet on the silken white sands of the Arabian Sea. And suddenly they all would decide to make a short flight, painting the blue Goan sky a beautiful grey-brown.



Curlew Sandpiper (Photo: Umesh Mani)

We saw a variety of Sandpipers - the Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*), Marsh Sandpiper (*Stringa stangnatis*) and Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*). These elegant birds had oh-so-delicate bills. We also saw a Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) and Brown-headed Gulls (*Larus brunnicephalus*) here.

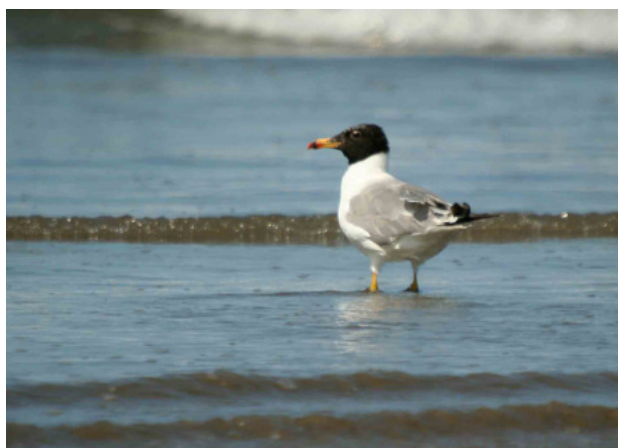
A clean White-bellied Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) in flight and a Pallas's Gull (*Larus ichthyaeus*) were voted by all as the *pieces de resistance* that graced the Morjim beach for us on that day.



White-bellied Sea Eagle (Photo: Sushil Kapadia)



Heuglin's & Yellow-legged Gulls (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Pallas's Gull (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Moving out from Morjim, Mr Frost's car led our taxis to yet another marvelous birding spot – the Carambolim Creek. As soon as we spilled out of our cars in excited anticipation, Mr. Frost spotted a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) perched far away and very high on a power pylon. Being a hardcore raptor fan, my thrill knew no bounds as I admired the falcon through Mr Lainer's and Mr Frost's powerful field scopes.

The majesty of the Peregrine has to be seen to be believed. Totally still and unmindful of the sun, it sat for a long time, giving us ample time to admire its proud profile. It is a solitary bird, hunting at dawn or early dusk, characteristically swooping down on its prey at incredible speeds. I would readily give my right arm to watch the Peregrine hunt!



Black-tailed Godwit (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Brahminy Kite chasing White-bellied Sea Eagle
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

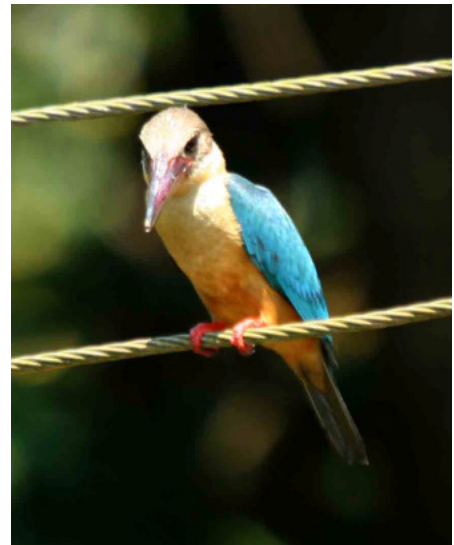


Lesser Adjutant (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Mr. Lainer spotted four stately and serene looking Black-tailed Godwits (*Limosa limosa*) with slender, straight and slightly upward curved bills. They sat very still in the water. I saw a Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) which has the prettiest red legs, and Common Greenshanks (*Tringa nebularia*). Also seen were a lone Lesser Adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*) slowly circling above and also a Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybridus*) and a Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*).

Shortly after that, I was ecstatic to see my second raptor of the day. An Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) perched high, again on an electric pylon! A dark brown fish-eating hawk, the Osprey flies up and down scanning the water for fish, and, at a suitable opportunity, doses its wings and hurls itself upon the quarry, striking the water with a great splash and often becoming completely submerged. It too sat for a long time allowing itself to be admired with utmost indifference. The more raptors I see, the more I begin to establish that raptors actually know they are devastatingly attractive!

Among other sightings, Mr Lainer & Mr Frost identified 6 types of Sandpipers, 4 types of Gulls and 8 types of Terns! After a few hours of very successful and immensely satisfying birding, we thanked both the gentlemen for their kindness and sat down to lunch. While waiting to be served, I thought how incredibly priceless our wader sightings were, with two raptors thrown in for good measure!



Stork-billed Kingfisher (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Pensively I philosophized, saying to myself that a bird, which is a symbol of total and unbridled spirit of freedom, doesn't have it so easy in reality. Each day is a struggle for survival and a veritable challenge throughout its lifespan. Yet each and every bird seems to pick up the gauntlet and go about its life with unmitigated vigor. Isn't there a lesson here somewhere that we are completely missing?

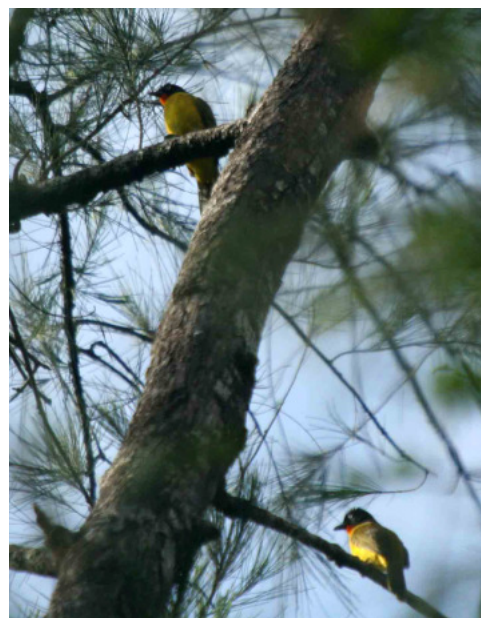
Day-4
Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary
Kalpana



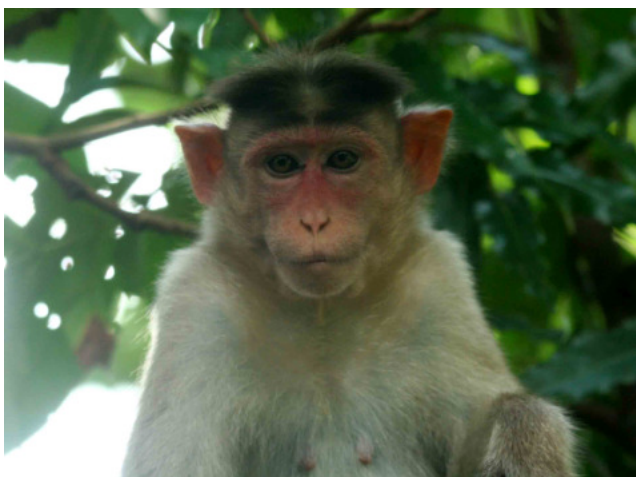
Changeable Hawk Eagle (Photo: Sushil Kapadia)

On day-4, knowing it was our last day at Goa, we set off early in the morning for Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary. As we were about to reach, the cars came screeching to a halt at the sight of a majestic Changeable Hawk Eagle preening itself on top of a dry tree. Some half an hour of excitement and a few assorted sightings later – including a Puff-throated babbler – we moved towards the gate of the sanctuary, where we were told that the gates would be opened only half an hour later. Not wanting to waste any time, we left the vehicles behind and began our trek up the winding roads typical of the Western Ghats.

A short distance from the gate, to our delight, we heard a bird call which sounded like a laugh. The group did not even have to call for an encore, for the calls continued. Initially we felt it was a Laughingthrush, but after spotting it, it was identified as the Malabar Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros griseus*). Further ahead we heard the Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus horsfieldii*), and sighted the Black-crested Bulbul (*Pycnonotus melanicterus*), now known as Ruby-throated Bulbul, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta (*Alcippe poioicephala*) and a few more Small Sunbirds.



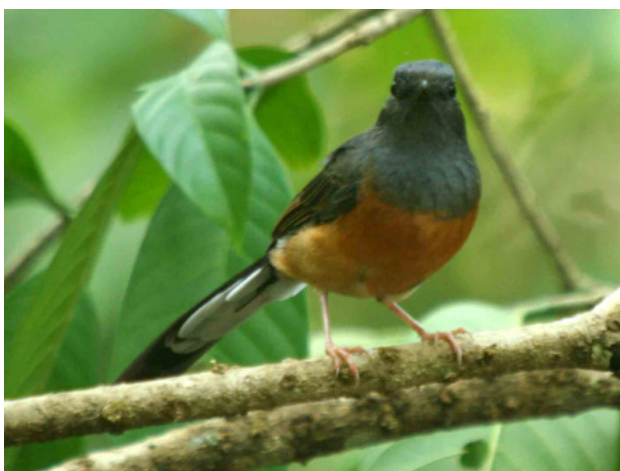
Ruby-throated Bulbul (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Bonnet Macaque (Photo: Umesh Mani)

The gates opened and the vehicles sped past us while we continued the trek upwards, where we were ravenously looking forward to our breakfast. After some debate, it was decided to eat at the cafeteria. There was a delightful spread of bread, butter, jam and cheese topped with omelettes and followed by coffee/tea. There were monkeys jumping on the roof of the cafeteria and we carefully avoided them on our way out.

After breakfast, some people went to look at the animals in the zoo, which included a lion, several varieties of snakes, and a peacock with broken feathers which actually danced before us!



White-rumped Shama (Photo: Umesh Mani)

One group took the route opposite to the canteen and within minutes of reaching the dense forest area, they were able to hear many bird calls. There was a lot of activity in the trees. Among the most significant sightings there, they saw a female White-rumped Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*), Brown Fish Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*), Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) and some Babblers which were originally identified as Rufous but, disappointingly, turned out to be Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striatus*). Running out of time, we drove down to an area which was reported to have the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, but unfortunately we were not able to get a sighting of the same. We did, however, get to see some Malabar Pied Hornbills (*Anthracerus albirostris*). Some of us also got to see the Malabar Giant Squirrel.



Malabar Giant Squirrel (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Finally, running out of time since we had to leave for Hyderabad that evening, we very unwillingly left for the hotel, vowing to return again, and soon.

For Private Circulation Only
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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 3 March 2011

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 13th March 2011, 6:00AM: Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest.

With the warm weather prevailing, the day should make for, not just a pleasant woodland walk, but also great birding. Ananthgiri has never disappointed and is a paradise for forest birds. One can see Flycatchers, White Eyes, Chloropsis, the Orange-headed Ground Thrush, Nightjars, among others. The Indian Pitta and the Brown Fish Owl have been reported earlier.

This will be a full-day trip. Please carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING:

Thursday, 24th March 2011, 6PM: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

A quiz tests your knowledge. This one is no different. A quiz can also increase your knowledge. This one does just that. Prepared by the incomparable Bikram Grewal, it flits through this broad avian habitat, perching in various Indian states, spiralling through history, diving at personalities, screeching at names, and hovering over illustrations. Come and experience the joys of birding within four walls.

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 27th March 2011, 6:00AM: AP Forest Academy, Dhulapally.

The Dhulapally campus is about 24 kilometers from the city. APFA is one of the centres that host compulsory training for the Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers annually. The campus has varied habitat and one should be able to see many ground birds and scrubland species like Francolins, Peafowl, Pied Crested Cuckoo, Hoopoes, Blue-faced Malkoha, etc.

This will be a half-day trip. Please carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

Trip Report – Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Shamshabad – 13th February 2011

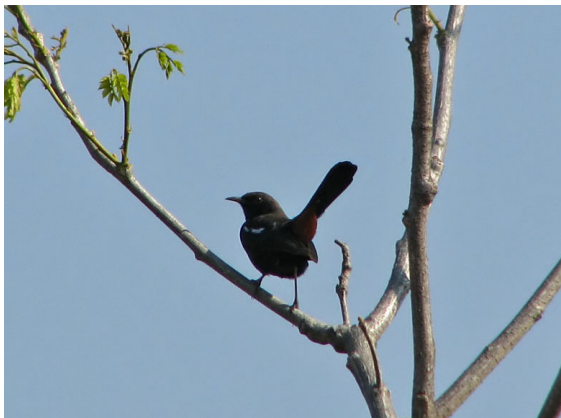
Surekha Aitabathula



Red-vented Bulbul (Photo: Asif Husain)

Fifteen of us set off towards Shamshabad airport early in the morning on one bright Sunday, with no intentions of taking a flight! Our collective intention was birding. We reached a hitherto unexplored birding site in the vicinity of the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport. We have to thank our friend and fellow-birder Ushodayan Thampy for efficiently guiding and coordinating our trip.

We spilled out of our cars at the APSRTC bus shelter and hopped into a waiting ambulance, if you please! Amidst loud laughter, we were told that the ambulance was the only vehicle available to ferry us to and fro from our birding site! The ambulance dropped us at the nursery. We started walking towards the Chinmaya School. Right here we saw a most attractive glistening colour of the Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*)! There were a couple of them flitting across from tree to tree across the road.



Indian Robin (Photo: Asif Husain)

Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) too were busily fixing breakfast for themselves! From the school we took a left to embark upon our three kilometer walk through grassland, if I may call it that. We planned to cover a miniscule three kilometers of the 5,500 acre campus of our classy Shamshabad Airport!

In single file we walked through a path in between tall grass. The path seemed to have been taken earlier as the grass seemed sufficiently flattened and trampled. It was so interesting and amusing to learn that the path we were taking was made by wild boars during the night! So in effect the wild boar was our path breaker!



Common Stonechat (Photo: Asif Husain)

En route, we saw the Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*), White-browed Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) and the Common Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*).

A little water body brought in plenty of Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) that never stopped asking us if we did it! Either they would suddenly and noisily take flight in pairs or stand alone in a meditative pose by the water. By the water, we also saw a White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) and a White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*).



Black-shouldered Kite (Photo: Asif Husain)

While negotiating this thorny and bushy grassland we were happy to spot three raptors - a Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*), a Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) and an Oriental Honey-buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*).

Identifying the Buzzard took quite some time and energy. Some of us reached for our field guides and some of us urged our good old lensmen to take pictures and show the ones already taken. I feel it is relevant to mention here the invaluable role played by photography in bird identification. After much discussion and debate, we decided that this particular aerial beauty, that was gliding

silently and unhurriedly, was a Short-toed Snake Eagle. However, it turned out later that it was actually an Oriental Honey-buzzard!

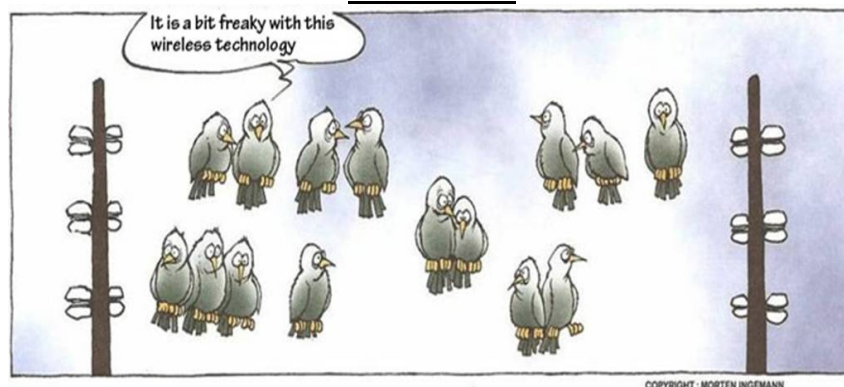


Oriental Honey-buzzard (Photo: Asif Husain)

The little Ashy Prinias (*Prinia socialis*) were aplenty, whereas a Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*) was perched on a tree all by itself. Having birded for a while now, I have found that a bird sitting all alone on a tree doesn't seem lonely at all. Somehow birds never give lonely vibes even if they are alone. Not only do they look self-sufficient and totally indifferent to us birders, they also make some of the most brilliant visuals ever seen in the world. Any lone bird on a leafless twig looks outstandingly beautiful and this defines the very meaning of pleasure to a birder.

After the walk-cum-birding we were all famished enough to start visualising a yummy breakfast. We were ferried to an uncrowded and clean canteen where we happily hogged one plate of *upma* each and washed it down with a very relaxing and a much-awaited cup of tea.

Bird Humour



(Contributed by: Mr Shafaat Ulla)

Report – Indoor Meeting, 24th February 2011

THE KING COBRAS OF AGUMBE: A PRESENTATION BY SREEKAR R.

Sivaji Anguru



Photo: Asif Husain

Sreekar Rachakonda is a member of BSAP and has worked as a Research Associate in the Agumbe Rainforest Research Station located in the Western Ghats in Karnataka. This 'Cherrapunji of South India' has the highest density of King Cobras in the country. Sreekar has worked closely with them, studying their behavior and aiding in the ongoing conservation of these forbidding, but rather shy reptiles.

We listened with utmost interest as Sreekar took us through his work. King Cobras (*Ophiophagus hannah*), he said, are the world's longest venomous snakes and are found in the Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats and North-Eastern parts of India. Their habitat has been under immense pressure because of human interference. This Research Station was established by the renowned herpetologist, Romulus Whittaker with the objective to conserve and protect the King Cobra and its habitat.

The conservation effort involves participation of the locals and their help is often sought. The local population worships the snake and does not harm it. They report its presence to the Research Station. These snakes very often wander into the villages and homes and have to be rescued. Fortunately, the mortalities from snake bite are very few (seven in the last 10 years). The reason being they are shy and avoid human beings. They become aggressive only when threatened. Secondly, the adult king uses its venom with care so as not to waste it. The last reported death was that of a person who handled the snake

when he was drunk. He died within fifteen minutes after the bite. Moral of the story - Don't handle King Cobras when you are drunk! Or better still - never handle them. There is no anti-venom for the King's venom!

To study the King Cobra's behavior, the researchers capture them and fit them with Radio Transmitters and track them regularly. A normal day of the snake starts early in the morning and these reptiles cover large distances of 80km and more during the day. At times they lose track of the snake. A number of unknown facts reveal themselves to these tireless researchers. Normally the king preys on rat snakes. The researchers found out that it is also feasting on Malabar Pit Vipers that are abundant in the area. During breeding season the snake builds a nest with leaves and lays 30-40 eggs. The mother leaves after laying these eggs. The nest built has a temperature of 28 degrees Celsius for the eggs to hatch. The hatchlings are left to nature to survive.

At Agumbe, they have successfully mapped the habitat of some snakes and studied their behavior closely. Not an easy job!

Agumbe also boasts of around 150 species of birds - Hornbills, Thrushes, Raptors and Flycatchers are in abundance. The endangered Lion-tailed Macaque is also sighted here. Leeches are plenty. I overheard BSAP members, who attended the indoor meeting, discussing a possible trip to Agumbe in the not-so-distant future.

The Wildfowl of Hyderabad – et cetera

“The Old Shikaree”

We have now run through the list of the acknowledged Game Birds that were regularly sought during the early days of the Hyderabad presidency. There are however, many other birds that were also popular with the epicure of that period but which did not fit any known tribe of the acknowledged Game Birds. The old *shikarees* of that period did not pursue these birds with any less zeal because they were not recognised game.

Some of the birds so pursued were of the tribe of Pigeons and Doves, Starlings and Mynas (Rosy Pastor or Rosy Starling), Munias and Sparrows (House Sparrow, Yellow-throated Sparrow or Chestnut Shouldered Petronia) and Cuckoos and Crows (Crow Pheasant). This last is most surprising as most of us were convinced that crows and members of that tribe are birds that have no place on the table – but apparently the Crow Pheasant was excellent eating! I confess however, that I have never been able to bring myself to put this statement to the test.

The old-time *shikarees* had a saying which, when translated from the original Urdu, states simply that “Amongst the straight-beaked birds, the Crow is non-legal meat; and amongst the hook-beaked birds, the Parrot is legal meat.” I have never heard of anyone eating parrots, but it stands to reason that a bird given to eating grain and fruits would have a correspondingly good flavour.

Most members of the pigeon tribe were well-known to the *shikarees* of the old Hyderabad state. Blue Rock and Green Pigeons were most eagerly pursued. The Green Pigeons we all universally known as “*Harial*”, and formed a prominent feature of camp meat in old hunting camps. The skill required to first find the birds amongst the green trees, then flush them from the trees and bring them down in flight called for much skill and the nimrod who could get a dozen brace of a morning was reckoned no mean exponent in the art of wing-shooting. Doves, being rather more simple birds, were capital quarry for the young *shikarees* of that time. In the days of long ago, when I was a fully paid-up member of the young *shikarees* club, I took up catapults as my chosen weapon in my pursuit of doves. Many years later, the catapult was replaced by an air-gun and that accounted for many doves and the odd pigeon too. But these birds, for all that they

were eagerly sought, were never classified as Game Birds. They were simply birds shot for the pot.

The Rosy Pastor was called “*Tilliar*” by the old-time *shikarees* and was a bird much sought after in the correct season. The birds used to (and still do) arrive in flocks numbering many hundreds and they left many of their numbers behind at the time of the return migration. They were most pursued by the man of slender means with the aid of a catapult or a scatter gun loaded with “dust”: By this means, many *Tilliar* wound up in pie or on toast. They have a most delicate flavour that would not shame full-time Game Birds.

Dr. Salim Ali started his career as an ornithologist by accidentally shooting a Sparrow! The old *shikarees* deemed that there is nothing accidental about shooting sparrows. They are most delicious morsels when roasted over a slow fire or fried in a pan with a blob of grease. I can sometimes taste them still when I am in reminiscent mood – though I gave up eating the birds at around the same time I gave up *shikaar*, many moons ago. Sparrows were very common around houses and bungalows and in old-day gardens in the early years and they did not need to be sought with fowling pieces either. Scatter some grain on the ground, rig up some sort of net and the birds would come to you – no need to quest afield in search of the quarry. At the same time be it said that, through much persecution of this sort, the birds were not always taken unawares. We ourselves, in our younger days tried many tricks to catch sparrows. After more than 40 years, I am still to catch a single one...

The Crow Pheasant was known to old cooks as being a bird of great flavour. Our old cook often specifically sent us forth to search for a “*Mahouka*” and bring it in time for *Sarkaar's* dinner. I have to admit that I got many for the old man, but could not bring myself to try the finished product. But those who did, pronounced it excellent!

Many other birds, edible and otherwise, were often shot in the old hunting camps of the early part of the 1900's. But though they were sometimes eaten too, they were all classed as camp meat and belong not to the tribes of the Game Birds of Hyderabad!

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Tickell's (or Pale-billed) Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*)



Tickell's (Pale-billed) Flowerpecker

(Cherlapally, 23-12-2010)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Dicaeidae
Genus: *Dicaeum*
Species: *D. erythrorhynchos*
Size: 8 cm

Description: The smallest bird in India, the Tickell's or Pale-billed Flowerpecker is a small olive-grey bird, with greyish-white underparts and short, slightly-curved, flesh-coloured bill (hence the name). It looks somewhat like a female sunbird in general effect. The sexes are alike. The Indian race, *D. erythrorhynchos*, is paler than the Sri Lankan race, *D. ceylonese*.

Behaviour: The Tickell's Flowerpecker is typically seen singly in urban gardens, forest plantations, groves, orchards, scrub jungle and thin deciduous forest. Its staple diet is the berries of the plant parasites *Dendrophthoe* and *Viscum* belonging to the mistletoe family. The ripe berries are swallowed whole and the sticky, slimy seeds are

excreted on to another branch of the same or a nearby tree, where they adhere and sprout within a few days, thus spreading the infestation. The Tickell's Flowerpecker utters a continuous, sharp *chick-chick-chick* while flying or hopping around among the parasite clusters. It also has a twittering song. It is distributed throughout the Indian Union (except the arid portions); also in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and maybe Myanmar.

Nesting: The Tickell's Flowerpecker nests mainly from February to June. The nest is a hanging oval pouch with a lateral entrance hole. It is made of soft fibres and vegetable down. The nests are usually suspended on twigs 3m to 15m above the ground. The clutch consists of 2 white eggs at a time. Both sexes share in the duties of building the nest and feeding the young.

Local name: It is known as 'phoolchuki' in Hindi and 'poopudupu jitta' in Telugu.

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 4 April 2011

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 17th April 2011, 6:00AM: Kasu Brahmananda Reddy (KBR) Park, Jubilee Hills.

Spread over 400 acres, this park was originally the Chiran Palace grounds. Plenty of peafowl and Partridges and some scrubland birds can be spotted. The lake in the park might throw some surprises as well.

This will be a half-day trip. Please carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: LIFE OF BIRDS

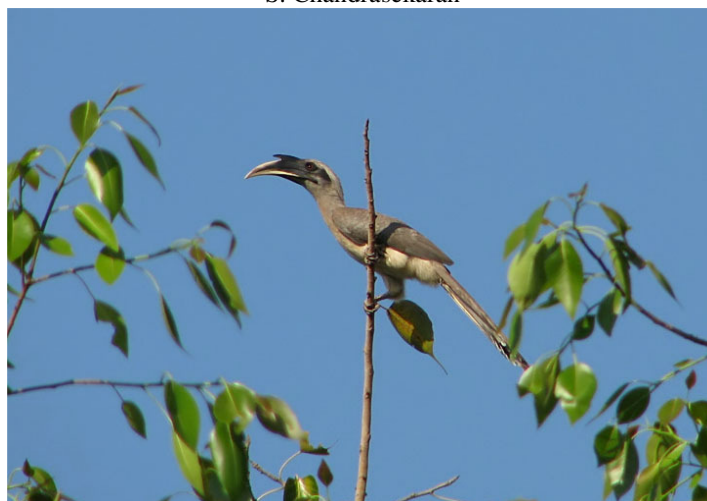
Thursday, 21st April 2011, 6PM: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

Colourful, mysterious, noble and intriguing, birds have fascinated us since the dawn of history. In 'Life of Birds', David Attenborough, one of the world's foremost naturalists, hosts an extraordinary exploration into the secret lives of these magnificent creatures.

THE DEMANDS OF THE EGG: Birds go to extraordinary lengths to protect their eggs, to keep them warm and safe from predators. To meet these challenges, they have developed the arts of pottery, carpentry, weaving, camouflage and deception.

Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills – 13th March 2011

S. Chandrasekaran



Indian Grey Hornbill (Photo: Asif Husain)

It was my first outing after coming to Hyderabad from Satyamangalam, which is a small town at the precincts of

a veritable forest range boasting of 1400sq.km of contiguous jungle bordering Tamilnadu and Karnataka.

This paradise was better known as the last refuge of the infamous poacher, Veerappan, than for the incredible diversity it harbors. Naturally, my expectations of Ananthagiri were not too high, for, to expect such a canvas around Hyderabad seemed improbable. However, Ananthagiri belied my thinking. It was not that grand or vast but looked more of an extended sacred grove you encounter in many parts of the Western Ghats. But the birding was rewarding and, at times, enchanting. Truly, I wasn't expecting such a pleasant surprise. The total tally for the day was a satisfying 65 species, considering that it was only a half-day outing!



Asian Paradise-flycatcher (Photo: Asif Husain)

The day began with all of us - Anjali, Asif, Yokes and me – reaching Ananthagiri by 7.15AM. Asif's friends, who were first-timers, joined us there. After a refreshing breakfast (surprisingly splendid in such a small village) we got down to serious birding. True to what Asif said, Ananthagiri is a place for flycatchers and thrushes. The highlight of the day was that one could see all the morphs of the Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) and the elusive Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*). But, the bird of the day was Blue-capped Rock-thrush (*Monticola cinclorhynchus*).



Small Minivet (Photo: Asif Husain)

The mixed hunting party of Gold-fronted Chloropsis (*Chloropsis aurifrons*), Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocerus*), Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*) and Common Ioras (*Aegithina tiphia*) were a treat to watch. Another sighting turned out to be very special – the Brown-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui*)!



Brown-breasted Flycatcher (Photo: Asif Husain)

A few Raptors - Crested Serpent-eagle (*Spilornis cheela*), Shikra (*Accipiter badius*), Changeable Hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*), and a Short-toed Snake-eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*), lent charm to the proceedings. The mimicking calls of the Drongo were fascinating to hear and observe, as was the flight of the group of Minivets, as they flew from tree to tree. The sallies of the Paradise-flycatcher, as ever, was fascinating to watch, as the adult male, with brilliant white streamers, criss-crossed our path. The Iora's melodious calls were like music to my ears. The thrush was a master of camouflage. To locate it amidst the dry leaves, aided only by its low whistle, was a challenge - a game to cherish.

Overall, it was wonderful birding trip and we all returned highly satisfied. It was definitely one to cherish!

Indoor Meeting, 24th March 2011

BIRD QUIZ

A Bird Quiz was conducted by Aasheesh Pittie during the Indoor Meeting. The Quiz was prepared by Bikram Grewal.

Trip Report – AP Forest Academy – 27th March 2011

Nilay Raha



On 27th March 2011, around 15 of us (BSAP members) headed to Andhra Pradesh Forest Academy (APFA) at Dulapally. Our host, Ms. Kshitija, DFO, organized this visit. This trip was also an orientation for the forest trainees.

APFA provides training to the forest professionals and personnel for better utilization of forest resources and has conducted trainings since 1987 on (a) livelihood planning, (b) bamboo for livelihood promotion, (c) forest-based crafts development, (d) clean development mechanism, (e) Non-timber Forest Produce (NTFP) for sustainable livelihoods, (f) participatory bio-diversity conservation and (g) community silviculture, (h) medicinal plants cultivation, development & marketing.

We reached the academy at 6:15 am and were greeted by the trainees and other forest officials. These trainees were divided into groups with a team leader. Experienced members of BSAP were delegated to lead each group and were assisted by fellow birders. After a brief description about BSAP by Mr. Sivaji Anguru, each group took different directions for bird watching.

I joined the group led by Mr. Kulkarni, a senior member of BSAP. Mr. Laique Ali, MLA also joined our group and we set off for birding within the campus. Some of us saw a Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*). It was interesting to note that some of the trainees in each group carried a birding book for their reference.

Before we proceeded further, Mr. Kulkarni mobilized all the group members at one place and gave few tips on bird watching and bird behaviour. Few of them were:

1. The group members should not whisper amongst themselves while birding. This would hinder proper identification of a bird through its call.

2. One should first try to view a bird through the naked eye and then study it closely through binoculars.
3. Birds migrate in the winter season from North to South due to various reasons - to avoid cold and stormy weather, to avail longer daylight hours for search of food, to avoid conditions that bring about scarcity of food, such as freezing of water and snow.
4. Monsoons - June/July to September/October - is the time when vegetation is more and insect life at its peak. A number of birds find the conditions right for raising families. By about mid-October the majority of young birds have left their nests.
5. The best time to view bird is early in the morning and in the evening because birds search for their food during this time.

All the trainees were pleased to get this information and it motivated them to actively participate in the field orientation. Eager to know more, few quick questions came up from the group - how to differentiate between a male and a female bird, what do birds generally feed upon, what would be the maximum distance covered by migratory birds, etc.



Red-vented Bulbul (Photo: Umesh Mani)

We then went inside the forest area and first saw the commons - White-headed Babblers (*Turdoides leucocephalus*), Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*) and Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*). The White-headed Babbler called from the top of a tree as the group approached it. Mr. Kulkarni suggested that the participants hear the call and then try and locate the bird. Almost all the trainees could locate the bird but did not get a chance to have a good view as it took off after encountering the huge group. I showed them the bird in Salim Ali's book on Indian Birds.

When we moved further on, we saw Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) and a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*) in the grassland, an Indian Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) and a male and female Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*) hopping from one branch to another. I pointed out to my group members the differences between the male and female Sunbirds. I informed them that male has metallic dark blue and purple colour, though appears to be black overall, while the female is olive green in colour. I also informed the trainees that in non-breeding plumage, the male looks very similar to the female but they have a black stripe running down the middle of the chest.

We slowly reached the academy periphery and noticed a Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*) sitting right in front of us on a tree, less than ten feet from us! It seemed to proudly show off its amazing green colours to us. All the members saw this green beauty and were, undoubtedly, thrilled with its presentation.

Little further ahead, outside the fence we spotted a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*). This time I and Mr. Kulkarni tried to show the group how to focus on a bird through the lens. Outside the boundary, near a small agricultural land we also saw a Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*).

On the way back, we met other groups led by Mr. Umesh Mani and Mr Humayun Taher and eagerly asked the regular question, "Which birds could you see?" The other birds they spotted were Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*), Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*), Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*), Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*), Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopacea*), Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*), White-headed Babbler (*Turdoides leucocephalus*), Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), Blue Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*), Yellow-eyed Babbler (*Chrysomma sinense*), Tawny-bellied

Babbler (*Dumetia hyperythra*), Blue-faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*), Thick-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum agile*), Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Nectarinia zeylonica*), Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides striata*), Indian Silverbill (*Lonchura malabarica*), Eurasian Stone Curlew (*Burhinus oedicephalus*), Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*), Great Indian Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*), Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*), Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Cuculus varius*), Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*), House Swift (*Apus nipalensis*) and Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*).



White-browed Wagtail (Photo: Asif Husain)

We reached the administrative building and near the main pathway, there are a few remarkable old trees. Here we spotted Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*), Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*), Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*), Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*), Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) and a lone Large Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) and a White-browed Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*). After viewing so many birds with beautiful colours, bird watching definitely caught the interest of all the trainees and yes, they promised us they would become serious birders!

After a sumptuous, relaxing breakfast offered by APFA, we exchanged our phone numbers and said our goodbyes to the forest officials and our fellow BSAP members. With a tally of over 50 birds, another wonderful birding trip concluded, keeping hope alive for another fulfilling day of birding in APFA.

The Wildfowl of Hyderabad – et cetera

“The Old Shikaree”

Camp meat, as they were termed, found their way onto the tables of old-time hunting camps. Lt. Col. Gordon Cumming, writing in the period just before the mutiny of 1857, mentions that a large cauldron was permanently standing over the fire in camp and “all manner of eatables were thrust promiscuously into it”. The good colonel mentions Hares, Hens, Ducks, Snipe, Partridge, Pigeons and Doves as just a few of the mouth-watering items in this magic potion!

Pigeons

There were many species of this very-popular game bird in the old Hyderabad State. The star place was given to the Green Pigeons, of which there were two that were regularly pursued. The Blue Rock Pigeon was also sought, but was not to be compared with the Green Pigeons, or “*Harial*”, in the matter of taste or sport. Green Pigeons were, and are, mostly found in forested areas where they do battle on ripening figs, nuts and berries. They are most active in the early mornings and late evenings, when large flocks gather at the nearest fig tree for a lavish repast.

The two species of Green Pigeons of the Hyderabad State were the Yellow-footed Green Pigeon and the Green Imperial Pigeon. Both were universally termed as “*Harial*” on account of their plumage and colouring, which has very marked shades of greens and browns. Excellently camouflaged, the birds are most difficult to sight in their chosen habitat. Both species are found mostly in hilly forests and areas with large trees of the ficus variety, which is their main source of food.

Old *shikarees* laid wait for them near such trees. But it was by no means an easy task to bag these birds. First, there was the little matter of finding them. Beautifully camouflaged in the green foliage, and not moving around very much, the birds often escaped notice completely. At long last, after much peering, a tail is noticed swinging around. A shot is fired and brings down two, while about a dozen fly out of the tree. A good wing shot may be able to bring down a couple more as they flush, but not many large bags were made.

One other pigeon must be mentioned here and that is the common Blue Rock Pigeon. This was a bird of fields and

dovecots. The large flocks of the birds seen in and around the cities nowadays are direct descendants of the wild Blue Rock Pigeons. For all that they are so easily available; the birds were rarely sought for *shikar*. It was said that the Blue Rock Pigeons were not good eating. I beg to differ... the birds that I remember were excellent eating. Or maybe that was because of the sauces that our old cook concocted.

Doves

These, the most simple of birds, were also popular camp meat and made many delicious curries. There are perhaps four species that Hyderabad can lay claim to and these are the Spotted, the Little Brown (or Laughing), the large Ringed and perhaps the Red Turtle Dove. Out of these, the Spotted Dove is most common in the region, followed closely by the Little Brown Dove. The Little Brown is now known as the Laughing Dove, a very misleading name. It had little to laugh about in the golden age of *shikar*. Much prized, it was relentlessly pursued by *shikarees* and small boys armed with catapults. I was a senior member of the black hand catapult club in the old days and waged war, most grimly, against this and the Spotted Dove with complete impartiality.

When not pursued, the birds are very confiding. Many visit the house these days and potter around picking up grain and they are most grateful for fresh water, which they drink much of. They delight in grain fields just after the harvest is done, and there is much spilled on the ground. The doves are convinced that this bonanza is their due by rights and will forgather in large flocks to lay claim and, occasionally, bicker about who should have a particularly lucrative patch. Even the large Ringed Doves will be found in these mixed flocks, though the latter is mostly a solitary bird. It is a much larger bird than the first two and very retiring in nature. The very prettily marked Red Turtle Dove is seen but rarely in these regions, but it, nevertheless, was common enough to serve as table meat in the old days.

As mentioned, these were not regular game birds but were mostly standby meat for camp. But for all that, they were pursued and so were prominent, if slightly inferior, members of the Game Birds of Hyderabad!

Bird Humour



(From The Hindu, 20-04-2010)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*)




Indian Robin (Left – Male, Right – Female)
(Cherlapally, 31-07-2010)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Muscicapidae
Genus: *Saxicoloides*
Species: *S. fulicatus*
Size: 19 cm

Description: The Indian Robin is sexually dimorphic in plumage, the male being mainly black with a white shoulder-patch or stripe (which may or may not be visible depending on posture and movements). In the northern populations, the upperparts are brown above, whereas the southern populations are more black-to-midnight-blue. Underparts are bluish-black. Males also have chestnut under-tail coverts which are clearly visible, since the bird usually holds its tail upright. The females are brownish above and greyish-brown below, and lack the shoulder-stripe as well. Juveniles look like the females, but the throat is mottled.

The Indian Robin has been divided into several races, depending mainly on differences in plumage. The nominate race, *S. f. fulicatus*, is found across southern peninsular India. *S. f. cambaiensis* of western India and *S. f. erythrurus* of eastern India have males with brown backs. *S. f. intermedius* includes forms in-between races *cambaiensis*, *erythrurus* and *fulicatus*. The Sri Lankan race is called *S. f. leucopterus*.

Behaviour: The Indian Robin is typically seen singly or in pairs, near human habitation. Its main habitat is open grassy, scrub or rocky and usually dry areas, and is mostly absent from thicker forest or wet areas. Populations are resident and non-migratory. The diet is mainly insects, but occasionally do take frogs or lizards, especially when feeding young. They tend to keep a distance when approached, hopping away in short flights, and seem to favour perches with clear field of view, usually seen perching on rocks, tops of bushes, and even rooftops. The call is a short series of whistle-like, sharp chirps. (To hear the call, right-click on the paper-clip shown on the right, then click on 'open file'. Please ensure the sound on your computer is ON). 

Nesting: The Indian Robin nests mainly from December to September, but can vary locally, and tends to coincide with the rains. Males sing during the breeding season, displaying by lowering and spreading their tails, fluffing their undertail coverts, and strutting around the female. Males can be aggressive and territorial during this period. The nest is built between rocks, in crevices in walls or in holes in trees. The clutch consists of 3-4 eggs, usually white and sometimes faintly green or pink, speckled or mottled, and usually oval in shape, though sometimes they can be elongated or even pointed. Only the female incubates, but both sexes share in feeding the young.

Local name: It is known as 'kalchuri' in Hindi, 'nalanchi' in Telugu and 'wannatikuruvu' in Tamil.

For Private Circulation Only

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 5 May 2011

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 15th May 2011, 6:00AM: Sanjeevaiah Park, Necklace Road.

Spread out over 90 acres, this park, abutting the Hussain Sagar Lake in the heart of the city, is a great spot for birding. Though the migrants would have long gone by now, sightings of a number of resident species make for a fruitful summer morning. The shady trees offer refuge to quite a few birds. Many of them should be nesting now, especially the Orioles, Sunbirds, Drongos, Asian Pied Starlings, etc. Leafbirds have been seen occasionally, so also Coppersmiths. The lakeshore should offer some waders and it may be possible to glimpse some Terns and Gulls.

This will be a half-day trip. Please carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

Trip Report – KBR Park – 17th April 2011

Text: Shafaat Ulla, Photos: Suresh Chitturi



Indian Peafowl

Come summer, temperatures start to rise in Hyderabad, especially during the months of April and May. We, therefore, confine ourselves to the city for our outdoor trips and avoid very long drives in the heat, but at the same time not missing our regular birding. With this in mind, we decided to visit KBR Park in Banjara Hills, for which permission was obtained.

We all gathered at the main entrance at promptly six in the morning and after exchanging pleasantries and introductions, proceeded into the park to start birding in earnest.

We were about 20 - a decent number, consisting of some new and potential members. There were Anita, Sonya and Ariz who came for the first time and the trio promised to become members of our society. Suresh was seen after a long time, with a huge lens mounted on a monopod. He brought along with him a few friends - Kavita, Andy, Uday, Srinivas, and others, who were quite enthusiastic and my only hope is that they will join us on our future trips.



Indian Golden Oriole

As soon as we entered the park we saw quite a few birds like the Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), Purple Sunbirds (*Nectarinia asiatica*), Small Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*), Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) and many more. The new comers were fascinated as the seniors identified the different species one by one.

Our birding continued as we proceeded towards the lake, a restricted area that we at BSAP, as a special case, are allowed to visit. En route, we encountered a Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) flying with some nesting material in its talons. We noticed that it was nesting in a rain tree. We also had a good look at Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*), plenty of Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) and some others, not to forget a lone River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*) flying overhead.



Green Bee-eater

The lake had shrunk considerably and resembled a large pond. We saw Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) in the water playing hide-n-seek. There were also the usual Little (*Egretta garzetta*) and Median Egrets (*Mesophoyx intermedia*), Indian Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*), Large Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*), Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) and a White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*). I have observed the waterhen breeding in the park at a different location. The elevated bund, not only, gives us a good and panoramic view of the lake and the surroundings, but is also an ideal place to sit quietly and observe birds from under the shady gulmohar trees. We utilised the opportunity to have our breakfast and take a little breather.



Indian Robin

Although it was not very hot as it had rained a few days earlier, it was hot enough to sap our energies. It was already nine o'clock and we had to traverse quite a long distance to reach the main gate. Keeping all this in mind, we, therefore, decided to head home. The walk back yielded some interesting species like the Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*), Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*) and finally near the entrance, a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) on a eucalyptus tree. As we were watching it, it took off, chasing away a Black Kite which was circling nearby - a sure sign that the Shikra was nesting in the same vicinity.

It was a nice outing, with a count of about 35 species - not bad for a four-hour outing, that too in the heart of the city.

Report – Special Talks by Bikram Grewal for BSAP members – 23rd April 2011

Text: Sagarika Melkote, Photos: Asif Husain



The month of April and May are absolute scorchers in Hyderabad. Apart from being family vacation time for most, the sweltering heat ensures birding trips are considerably less in number.

To make up for the paucity of birding trips, the BSAP was in for a rare treat in April. Bikram Grewal, one of India's leading ornithologists, eminent author and wildlife expert, agreed to visit Hyderabad, to deliver a series of talks and, also, to informally interact with BSAP members.

On April 22nd, Mr. Grewal presented a talk on “Birds of the North East” at the Goethe Zentrum. Accompanied by a series of breathtaking pictures, he held us spellbound for an hour where he covered five main zones of North Eastern India - Assam, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and the kingdom of Bhutan. Lesser known species of birds came alive on the screen as Mr Grewal reeled off names upon names, laced with interesting anecdotes about his experiences in the wild. On a more serious note, Mr Grewal also touched on the problem of the hunting tradition which has contributed to the decline in the numbers of species. Conversely, it was heartening to hear about villages which have banned hunting altogether. The underlying message was - while a lot is being done towards conservation, we still have a long way to go.

An interesting fall out of Mr Grewal's talk was that the attendees immediately made up their minds that a trip to the North East was in order and ought to be undertaken pronto!! Plans for the same were discussed at once and a tentative time of the year was agreed upon.

The BSAP annual dinner was scheduled for the same evening, where Mr Grewal presented another riveting talk on British Indian natural history art and how birds have featured in them over centuries.



Over 100 people sat in rapt attention as Mr Grewal traced Indian art from 17th century onwards and bird drawings from various schools of Indian art. What was extremely interesting was the highly unlikely juxtaposing of history with ornithology – who would have thought the two subjects actually had something in common!!!



A slide show featuring rare and beautiful paintings of birds, pictures of manuscripts, which were the first ever texts on Indian birds, made for the perfect accompaniment to Mr Grewal's talk, also evidencing the great lengths to

which he has gone to put together such a brilliant presentation!! It was interesting to note that quite a lot of slides were taken from Mr. Grewal's personal collection. A huge learning experience indeed!!

BSAP members also had the privilege of spending the rest of the evening with Mr. Grewal as he patiently answered queries.

The evening saw another side of the BSAP. All members had turned out in colourful and attractive evening dresses – a far cry from our usual dull browns and greens. As Mr. Shafatullah put it “the lady members of the BSAP are looking truly smashing this evening!” Somebody else was heard remarking how nice it was to see the BSAP ladies wearing something other than binoculars around their necks! All in all, a relaxing evening, spent in easy camaraderie, where the BSAP members bonded over food, exchanged views and met with each other's families.

Report – Visit to Hitex Lake – 1st May 2011

Text and photos: Humayun Taher



On Friday, 29th April, Shafaat saab rang me up to say that he had discovered a very interesting and exciting place within the limits of the Hyderabad IT district which had “hundreds of ducks”. Intrigued by the possibility of waterfowl in the summer months, I agreed to join him on a field trip to this place on Sunday morning. And so it was arranged. Asif and Kullu joined us at Shafaat saab's house and we headed out to the campus of the HICC. The lake is just before the Novotel Hotel and behind the HICC building. We reached the place around 10 in the morning and found a suitable place with a bit of shade to park the car. The heat was already fierce, with the thermometer in the car registering 39 degrees in the shade.

Notwithstanding, the lake was indeed a sight for sore eyes. I decided immediately that Shafaat saab had, if anything, understated the actual case. The place was alive with avian activity. Large groups of Lesser Whistling-Teal (*Dendrocygna javanica*) and Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) were visible on the lake shore. Common Moorhens (*Gallinula chloropus*) patrolled the shores; three Wood Sandpipers (*Tringa glareola*), silent rebels to nature's call, trotted around in the shallows; Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) also went about their business. Strangely, the strident warnings of the Red-wattled Lapwings were conspicuously absent.



We decided to first walk along the shores before attempting closer approaches. But before doing that, from the shade of the tree under which the car was parked, I did a sweep-census of the place and found close to 200 Spot-billed Ducks, with perhaps the same number of Lesser Whistling Teal. Further along, there were more of these birds, bringing the total to approximately 250.



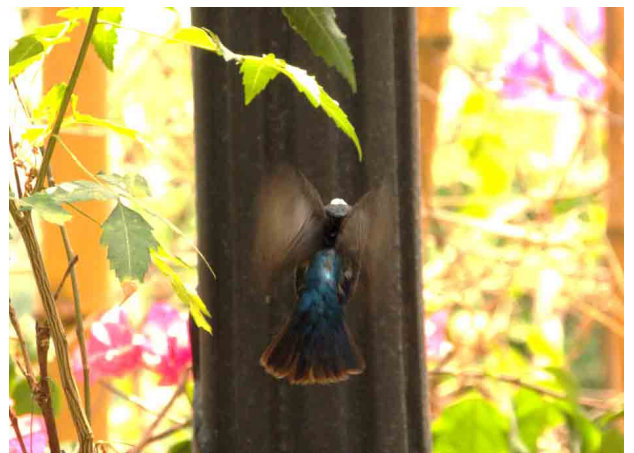
Foremost among the resident birds, it was the Common Coots (*Fulica atra*) that caught our attention. There was a pair accompanied by five very small chicks. Several times, I was able to observe one of the adults dart forward and catch something from the water surface, then swim back and feed it to one of the chicks. There was a second pair, accompanied by six youngsters in about the same stage as the first pair. Apart from this, there was one pair with more grown-up youngsters; these young birds were obviously able to fend for themselves with a little guidance from the parent birds.

One individual Coot was seen carrying a ridiculously long twig towards a small rocky island in the water, where a nest was, obviously, being constructed. It had selected a couple of small rocks sticking out of the water as a suitable place and was observed bringing twigs and bits of weed to this place. From what we saw, the nest appeared almost ready and it is possible that as the place is not very disturbed, the birds may be breeding quite successfully.

Certainly throughout the area we counted more than about 50 Coots.



One of the more pleasant surprises was the discovery of the nest of the Black-winged Stilt. This is the first time I have seen the bird nesting around Hyderabad and it is very interesting to note that this area has been selected by the birds as suitable for nesting activity. A male purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*) was observed picking up a casing of spider eggs. It could be taking them to feed its young. Two pairs of Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) were seen in their breeding plumage.



The lake appearance is not very prepossessing as there is considerable growth of algae in the water, which is green in colour. We made some enquiries of a local person and he told us that the lake was originally created while the buildings were being made. The earth excavated for the building purposes, left this large depression in the ground which filled up with rainwater and, over the years, has become this almost permanent lake. We noted that nowhere does the water give the impression of being more than a couple of feet in depth. Of course, it is possible that the rains may increase the water level and perhaps reduce the algae growth during the monsoons, but the present picture is a very shallow lake with considerable vegetable matter mixed with the waters.

There is no known source of water into this lake, so it is possible that it is mostly dependent on rainwater draining in. At the same time, owing to being in a protected area (with the Novotel Hotel and the HICC being a high-protection zone), it is possible that this protection is responsible for the bird-life rather than the lake water in itself. More research is required into this to see what the prime attraction is.

The surrounding areas are well preserved and the authorities have certainly made some additions, such as plantations of bamboo around the lake shores, and planting of trees around it. There are a couple of large fruiting ficus trees on the lake shores and these are attracting frugivorous birds to the area.

We ourselves observed Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*), Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*) and both species of Flowerpecker on these ficus trees. It is possible that the

proper season may also bring in flocks of Rosy and Brahminy Starlings to these trees.



The Wildfowl of Hyderabad – et cetera “The Old Shikaree”

The last of the few species that may, properly, be termed as “Wildfowl”, inasmuch that the term Wildfowl is synonymous with “Game Birds”, are the Rosy Pastor (Rosy Starling nowadays), the Sparrows and that unlikely candidate, the Crow Pheasant.

Starlings and Mynas

Only one species of this tribe was a genuine game bird, and that was the *Tilliar*, or Rosy Pastor as it was called earlier. These birds would come over in flocks numbering several hundred strong. A single large flock that I have seen in early days was close to 500 birds. Smaller flocks are commoner, numbering about a couple of hundred odd birds. In the correct season, many specimens forgather when the fig trees are in bloom. They are also very fond of the fleshy petals and nectar of the *Palas* Tree, (Flame-of-the-Forest). The fleshy red flowers of this tree produce nectar that is a favoured part of the diet of this bird. Huge flocks descend on trees in bloom and it is a wonderful sight to see; the pink and black of the birds contrasting strongly against the bright green and red of the blooming trees.

Old time *shikarees* held many *battues* against these birds when they found them. The birds were termed as most excellent meat and were therefore much pursued. Strangely, given that the diet is more-or-less the same, the closely allied Brahminy Starling did not figure on the menu anywhere. Only the Rosy Starling was the unfortunate one which was pursued. I have, in my days, participated in an epicurean feast of this nature, where the dish of the day was roasted *Tilliar*. They made excellent eating, I must say.

Sparrows

The good Dr. Salim Ali was converted to a career in ornithology by his fortuitous shooting of a Yellow-throated Sparrow. Less celebrated but no less keen, we young fellows started our, dare I say, sporting career by shooting Sparrows for the pot. Roasted in a pan over a blob of grease, they made excellent morsels. Our cook was a gifted man when it came to game and he was especially good with these little birds, converting them into excellent curries, soups and casseroles. Alas, the old man carried most of his recipes into his grave; and perhaps that is just as well, given the scarcity of game in these days.

House Sparrows were the most pursued species on account of their relative abundance, which was much in evidence in the old days of the Hyderabad State. Scarcely a house that did not have a small flock in almost permanent residence. They used to build in the nooks and crannies of the ceiling, from the cup of a disused fan in the drawing room, to the hole in the wall where a brick had fallen out and was awaiting replacement... They were much pursued by slippers and such sundry articles by the cook and his assistants; notwithstanding this attitude, the cook did not fail to set out a small saucer of water and a handful of paddy in summer to keep the birds happy. This magnet was much appreciated by us young scamps who laid wait for the birds, armed with catapults and air pistols. Our elders were not immune to the table attractions of these birds and several dinners I have enjoyed in the old days when Sparrows were the only item on the menu.

Cuckoos

Only one of this tribe was at all pursued, and that was that large fowl, the Crow Pheasant or *Mahouka* as he was popularly called. Few people I have spoken to have ever spoken about the culinary use of these birds, but those that have term it most excellent eating. I have never been able to summon up the courage to take a bite myself, but the old man had a passion for these birds and it was my lot to keep him supplied on demand.

On the ground, the Crow Pheasant is a most ungainly bird, as it hops around or leaps up and down, chasing grubs and roaches. The colour scheme is, I admit, quite

dandy with the russet wings and the black plumage contrasting quite tastefully. They are fairly common in gardens and hedgerows and came much to the notice of the nimrod owing to this visibility.

Besides these, there were very few species of birds that were pursued. I learnt from an old crony that waterhens, egrets and herons and such like were sometimes shot by them and given to the camp followers as meat. But such species, for all that they were killed and eaten in the old days cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be called members of the Game Birds of Hyderabad!



The new BSAP cap is now available. Grab yours as soon as possible to avoid disappointment!

Cost: Rs 100.00 only

Contact Mr Shafaat Ulla on 98492-29552 or shafaat_ulla@yahoo.co.in

Bird Humour

ANIMAL CRACKERS



(From The Times of India, 22-07-2010)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*)



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White-breasted Waterhen (Cherlapally, 14-08-2010)

Order: Gruiformes
Family: Rallidae
Genus: *Amaurornis*
Species: *A. phoenicurus*
Size: 32 cm

Description: The adult White-breasted Waterhen has dark grey-brown upperparts, white face, foreneck and breast, and rufous-cinnamon undertail coverts. The bill and legs are yellow. They have very long, disproportionate-looking toes which help spread their weight and allow them to walk on leaves, lily-pads etc on water. The juvenile is duller and has olive-brown upperparts and greyish face, foreneck and breast.

The White-breasted Waterhen has been divided into several races. The nominate race, *A. phoenicurus*, is described from Sri Lanka but is widely expanded to include *A. p. chinensis* from mainland India and adjoining regions of Asia, west to Arabia and east nearly to Japan. The other subspecies are from the islands and include *insularis* of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, *midnicobaricus* of the central Nicobars, *leucocephala* of Car Nicobar, *maldivus* of the Maldives, *javanicus* of Indonesia and *leucomelanus* of Sulawesi and the Lesser Sundas.

Behaviour: These birds are usually seen singly or in pairs, along the edges of waterbodies, generally on the ground

but sometimes also on low vegetation. They tend to hold up and jerk the tail as they walk. While foraging, they probe the mud or shallow water with their bills and also pick up food by sight. Their diet consists mainly of insects, small fish, aquatic invertebrates and seeds of some plants. Occasionally, they may be seen feeding in deeper water like the Moorhens. Their main habitat is marshes, reeds, bushes and grassland near waterbodies. Populations are resident and non-migratory. The rails as a whole are generally regarded as very nervous and secretive, but the White-breasted Waterhens are quite often seen in the open. The birds can be noisy around dawn or dusk with loud, croaky calls. The Andamans sub-species is said to make duck-like *quack* calls. (To hear the call of the White-breasted Waterhen, right-click on the paper-clip shown on the right, then click on 'open file'. Please ensure the sound on your computer is ON).



Nesting: The White-breasted Waterhen nests mainly from June to October, but can vary locally. The courtship display includes bowing, billing and nibbling. The nest is built in a dry spot on the ground in marsh vegetation. The clutch consists of 6-7 eggs. Incubation and parenting duties are shared by both sexes. The chicks may dive underwater to escape predation.

Local name: It is known as 'jalmurghi' or 'dawak' in Hindi, 'buda kodi' or 'tellabora neeti kodi' in Telugu and 'kanaan kozhi' in Tamil.

For Private Circulation Only

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 6 June 2011

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 19th June 2011, 6:00AM: University of Hyderabad.

The University of Hyderabad boasts of a lush green campus with two lakes, christened as Peacock and Buffalo. Woodland birds abound here. Ioras provide the background score to lectures. The Library resounds with the call of the Tickell's Blue Flycatchers and Scaly-breasted Munias. Small Minivets prance in the trees around as students lunch at the canteen.

This half-day trip promises to be a pleasant outing. Carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: Life of Birds

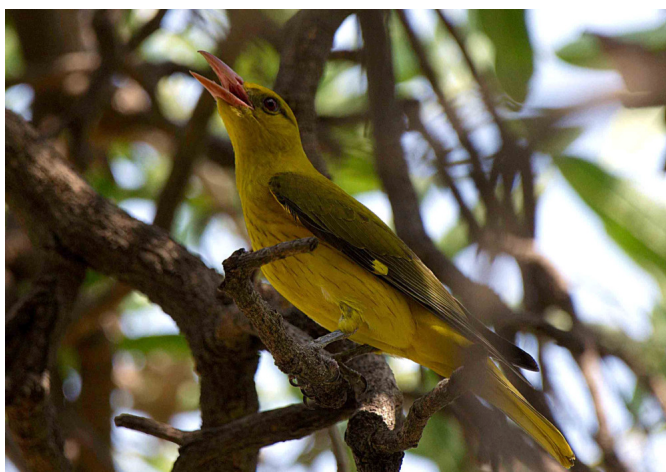
Thursday, 23rd June 2011, 6PM: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

Colourful, mysterious, noble and intriguing, birds have fascinated us since the dawn of history. With the series *The Life of Birds*, David Attenborough, one of the world's foremost naturalists, hosts an extraordinary exploration into the secret lives of these magnificent creatures.

The Problems of Parenthood: Bringing up a baby, for any animal, is a demanding business. Most birds are exemplary parents, tending devotedly to their offspring, but some are content to leave their rearing to others or to neglect all but the chick most likely to survive.

Trip Report – Sanjeevaiah Park – 15th May 2011

KB Anand



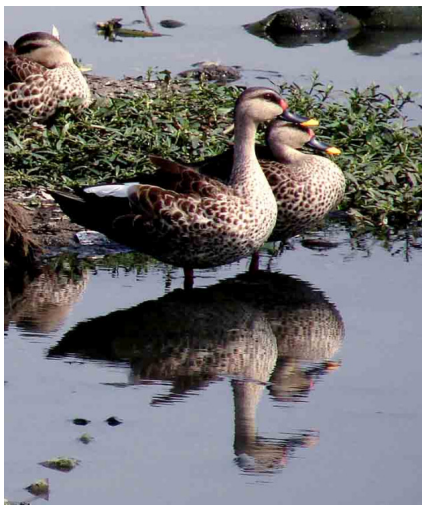
Indian Golden Oriole (Female) (Photo: Mahipal)

A group of 15 birders gathered at the Sanjeevaiah Park entrance by 6:30 on a cloudy morning. The clouds made the mid-summer day bearable as we set out to look for waterfowls and waders. Almost immediately we spotted

the Common Coot (*Fulica atra*). They outnumbered all other bird life in and around the park. They were seen feeding their young ones.



Common Coot & Little Grebe (Photo: Humayun Taher)



Spot-billed Duck (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

We saw Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) thriving in Hussain Sagar Lake. I have often wondered how these fresh-water ducks live in the dirty and murky water of the lake. The condition of the lake was even worse than what I had seen earlier. There was plastic covering the water surface at least 3 meters from the shore into the lake. I am sure there is more rubbish under water. The colour of water was just inexplicable.

Humayun showed me a pair of courting House Crows (*Corvus splendens*). I generally tend to ignore these common birds. I would have missed this behaviour of the crows had he not shown it to me. Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) were busy flying across the lake, stopping occasionally to feed. Black-crowned Night-herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) were seen with juveniles on a wooden mesh in the middle of water. An interesting sighting was 3 Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) which were sunning themselves on a rock. A flock of Black Ibises (*Pseudibis papillosa*) flew high over the lake.



Little Egret (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

A small pond in the park had many Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*). Some of them had beautiful breeding plumes at the back of their head. Their feet were dark yellow. Shafaat saab described these Little Egrets as having black legs and wearing yellow shoes! The colours were so contrasting and striking. Indian Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*) too were in breeding plumage. The base of their bills was bluish in colour. So it's not just the plumes which change colour during courtship season.



Purple Heron (juvenile) with Indian Pond Heron (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

A lone juvenile Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) flew into this pond. It took us a while to identify this bird as it was camouflaged in the reeds.



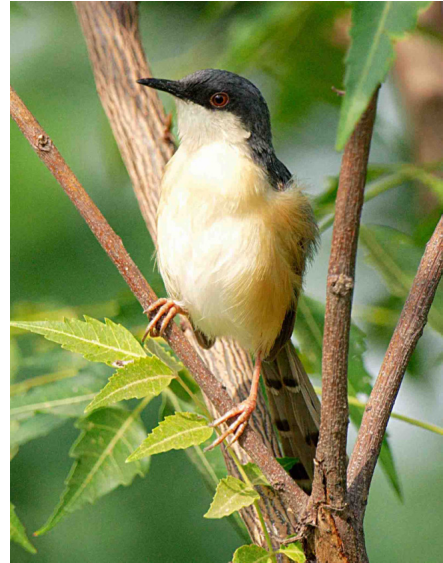
River Tern (Photo: Humayun Taher)

At a far distance, on a boulder, a lone Gull was seen among the Coots and Cormorants. It was too far to identify the species. Thanks to Humayun's new spotting scope, we could clearly observe its head, wings and the red beak, and finally concluded that it was the Brown-headed Gull (*Larus brunnicephalus*). A pair of restless River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) were seen on the water's edge. One constantly flew calling loudly and chasing Crows and Kites while the other was sitting still on a patch of land covered in grass. The birds were incubating their eggs. I have seen eggs of other birds in the past, but I never seen a bird actually sitting on its eggs and incubating them. It was an interesting sight to watch.



Painted Terrapin (Photo: Humayun Taher)

A tortoise, later identified as a Painted Terrapin, came out of water and was still, confused by the presence of humans around. We took some pictures and videos of it and later guided it into the water.



Ashy Prinia (Photo: Mahipal)

A pair of Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*) appeared briefly to divert our attention from the water birds. An Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*) perched on a small tree allowed the photographers an excellent opportunity to capture its pictures. I heard the calls of the Shikra (*Accipiter badius*), Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*) and Pale-billed (Tickell's) Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*).



Cattle Egret (Photo: Humayun Taher)

The sun was out and it was getting hot by this time. Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) were resting in the shadows of large trees.



Coppersmith Barbet Adult (Top) and Young (Above)
(Photos: Mahipal)

Mahipal told me early that morning that a member of APPS (Andhra Pradesh Photographic Society) shot wonderful pictures of the Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) feeding its young in a nest close to the park gate. Interestingly we found the nest. The nest was actually a hole in the branch of a tree. The adult Barbets would come with a mouthful of small and ripe *figus* fruits, land on the tree at some distance from the nest, and observe the Crows, Kites and humans around. They would approach the nest slowly and carefully. As soon as they reached the nest, the chicks would grab their delicious meal and go back quickly into the nest. We observed this for a while. One chick stuck its head out and looked at us and the surroundings, giving us the opportunity to take some pictures. The adult Barbet entered the hole and came back with mouthful of, what appeared to be, seeds and scraps of *figus* fruits. It looked

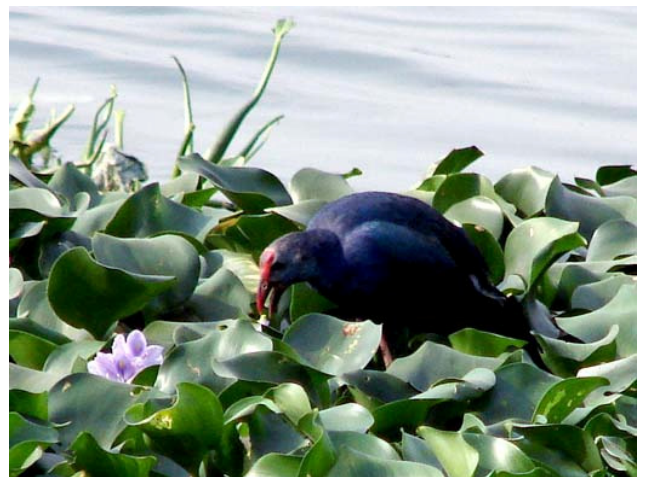
like the bird had cleaned up the interiors! It was a pleasure to watch all this.



Asian Pied Starling (Photo: Humayun Taher)

We also met some members of APPS. I saw some of the pictures they had shot of an Asian Pied Starling (*Sturnus contra*) bringing food for its chicks. Their pictures were very nice.

Being breeding season for most of the resident birds, we got to see interesting bird behavior. Finally, after quenching our thirst with Lemon Soda, we called it a day.



Purple Swamphen (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

The Wildfowl of Hyderabad – conclusion

“The Old Shikaree”

The days of the *Shikarees* are almost at an end these days. The fraternity itself remains a relic of a bygone era. I myself now do little except reminisce about the days that were. Not that I am complaining with my little lot. I consider that I have had the best of both worlds; having started in the era when *Shikar* was an accepted, even welcome, break from the humdrum of normal life, I have now graduated to the conservation era. Given the extremely precarious position of most of the game birds these days, this is a much needed requirement.

In my early days, as I have tried to portray in my preceding little notes, the gentleman *Shikaree* was a person scrupulously honest in keeping to the rules of sport. This does not apply to the present poaching fraternity, for whom the rules, if at all known, were only a nuisance and not to be followed at all. Of course, there are black sheep in any community but it is not correct to damn the entire community of sportsmen because of the atrocious conduct of a few individuals. If you were to talk to the tribe of sportsmen, you may well find that they were (and continue to be, such as they exist), amongst the first to lament the degeneration of a sport in which they themselves found much delight.

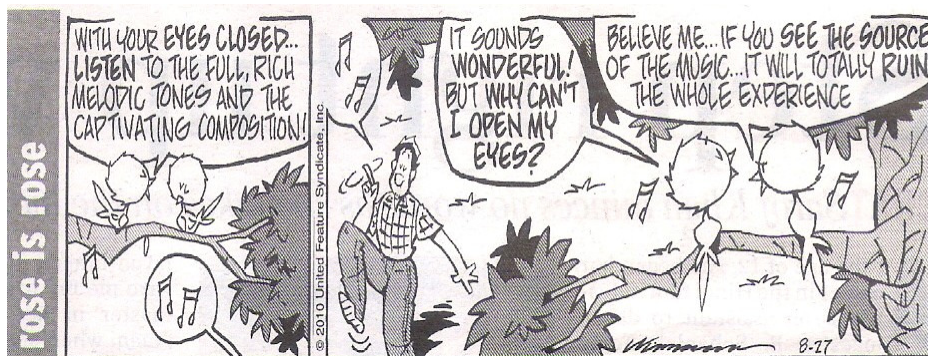
It is perhaps a curious thing that very little literature exists on everyday *Shikar*. What literature does exist seems to deal mostly with the large and organised hunts for the larger game animals. The shooting for the pot that was a regular feature of old-time *Shikar* camps has been not though worthy of placing on record at all. And yet, it was one of the most pleasant parts of a hunting camp. On the days when there were no beats organised for tiger or any of the larger carnivora, the sportsmen put in several pleasant hours in the pursuit of Junglefowl, Doves and Green Pigeons. Jack Denton Scott in his book “Forests of the Night”, devotes a chapter to Dove and Junglefowl hunting. It is perhaps one of the few references I have

been able to find on bird shooting in books on big game hunting. He also, in the same book, goes on to describe one of the last organised hunts in the fabled Bharatpur waterfowl preserve, under the auspices of the then Maharaja of Bharatpur.

I have myself never taken part in any such organised *Shikar* camps. Our trips were restricted to short week-end trips into the surrounding scrub areas of the old Hyderabad district where we contented ourselves with the occasional partridge, jungle cock, quail or, more rarely, the odd bustard or peacock. Again, seasons were very important to us nimrods. During the summer months, there was a strict moratorium on the number of Sandgrouse that could be collected. If we observed Sandgrouse taking on a cargo of water (which they do by wetting their sponge-like belly feathers), that bird was strictly taboo and could not be touched as we knew it was carrying the water for chicks. And in the breeding season, our guns and fowling pieces were laid aside until the nuptial activities were at an end and the birds once more became lawful sport.

In my earlier notes, I have tried to present the flavour of sport as we enjoyed it in our younger days. I have, of course, also tried to present some matters of interest to the new breed of ornithologists and nature lovers. It has had the dual advantage in that it allowed me to delve into early memories of days gone by, spent in the congenial company of fellow nimrods of my generation. I have purposely avoided, as much as possible, descriptions of the chase as it is in poor taste to talk of such matters in this era where conservation is the keyword. At the same time, if fellow sportsmen of my time are able to identify and delight in the few anecdotes I have permitted myself to narrate, then I would consider that my poor efforts have had some effect in introducing my readers to the tribes of the Game Birds of Hyderabad!

Bird Humour



(From The Hindu Metro Plus, 27-08-2010)

Sighting of the Sooty Tern near Hyderabad

Humayun Taher, Umesh Mani, K.B. Anand, Nilay Raha



Sooty Tern (Photo: Umesh Mani)

On 28th May 2011, Humayun, Umesh, Anand and Nilay birded at Ananthagiri Hills for the first five hours of the day. After that we decided to explore the area beyond Ananthagiri for possible birding spots hitherto not known.

Anand had heard about a water body ahead of Ananthagiri Hills but had not had occasion to visit the place. We checked with people along the way whether there is any such water body in the vicinity and received positive information. Following the leads, we finally found a huge water body called Nagasamandar near Kotepally village. This place is about 20 km. from the Ananthagiri temple. The water body is very large and, at full level, the spread would appear to be considerable. Even now, in mid-summer, the water spread was quite respectably large. We reached Kotepally at about 12.15 in the afternoon.

The day was a trifle rainy and grey, and also, as it was already late in the morning, avian activity was correspondingly low. We saw some Indian River Terns fishing over the lake and some Egrets at the bank. While photographing the fishing River Terns, we observed one bird which appeared markedly different. It flew around, close to where we were standing, for about two minutes and we were able to observe the bird from close quarters and take a few photographs also. The bird had very dark upperparts with a black crown. A white forehead patch extended to just before the eyes. The tail was deeply forked and edged with white. There also appeared to be white leading edges of the wings. All these morphological details were noted because by now we were quite certain that we were looking at something new.

A good round of discussion on identity followed and, referring to the Rasmussen Field Guide and Krys Kazmierczak we narrowed it down to either the Bridled Tern (*Onychoprion anaethetus*) or the Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*). Both these species are predominantly coastal birds and therefore we were most skeptical and repeatedly kept referring to the photographs taken by Umesh and Anand. At last, we narrowed it down to the Sooty Tern. However, to make it absolutely certain, we also referred to senior birders and received confirmation that the identification is quite correct and the bird was identified as an Adult Sooty Tern.

How the bird came here is a question that is outside the scope of this note to answer. What is apparent however, is the point that the Sooty Tern has now been added to the list of birds of A.P. The observation also underlines the cardinal rule – that we must carefully observe each and every bird even in a large flock of what appears to be a single species.

Bird of the Month
Text and photos: Umesh Mani


Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*)



Plum-headed Parakeet Male (L) (Sainikpuri, 14-02-2010) and Female (R) (Pocharam 21-03-2010)

Order: Psittaciformes
Family: Psittacidae
Genus: *Psittacula*
Species: *P. cyanocephala*
Size: 36 cm

Description: The adult male Plum-headed Parakeet is a mainly green bird with a plum-red head, which becomes purple-blue on the back of the crown, nape and cheeks. It has a black chin stripe and neck collar, a red shoulder patch and a white-tipped blue-green tail. The female has a pale grey head and lacks the black chin stripe and neck collar. The immature has a green head and a tail that is shorter than the adults. The adults have a yellow upper mandible and a dark lower mandible, both of which are yellowish in the immature.

Behaviour: The Plum-headed Parakeet is usually found in forests and open, well-wooded areas. These birds are gregarious and noisy, with a range of raucous calls. Its usual contact call is an 'oink?' repeated intermittently. In captivity, like other parakeets it can learn to mimic beeps and whistles, but it is not a very good 'talker'. (The call can be heard here). 

Populations are resident and non-migratory, but may move about locally, these movements being driven by availability of the fruits and flowers that constitute their main diet. They also eat seeds, nuts, berries, vegetables and grains.

Nesting: The Plum-headed Parakeet nests mainly from December to April. It builds its nest in holes in trees, and lays 4-6 white eggs at a time. Incubation is done by the female and takes 24 days.

Local name: It is known as 'tuinya tota' in Hindi, 'lalsir-tota' in Bengali and 'rama chiluka' in Telugu.

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 6 June 2011(Special Issue)

Special Report
Asian Waterfowl Census, January 2011

Shafaat Ulla & Humayun Taher

Come January, birdwatchers get busy counting birds at various wetlands throughout India and all over Asia, from Afghanistan to Japan. The apex body for this is Wetlands International based in the Netherlands. The idea of this exercise is to record the bird population, species-wise, year after year. Comparisons made over a period of time reveal migration patterns, condition of the water body, etc.

The AWC programme was initiated in the Indian Subcontinent in 1987 under the framework of the International Waterbird Census, which has been running successfully since the mid-sixties in Europe. Till date, more than 3000 wetland sites have been identified in our country.

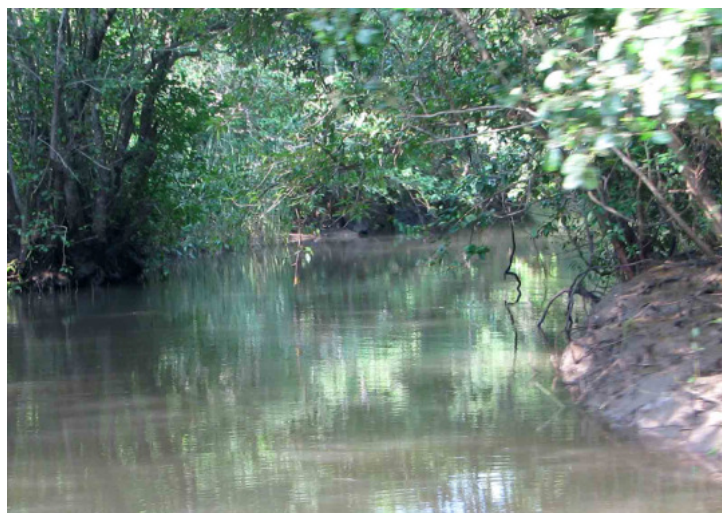
Closer home, BSAP members also do their bit by visiting various water bodies and record their observations in a data-form provided by Wetlands International. These forms have to be filled up and sent to the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) at Mumbai, situated at the office of the Bombay Natural History Society. IBCN gathers data from all over India and sends it to Wetlands International.

This January 12 BSAP members visited 13 sites. Since we come across a considerable variety of birds, one needs to be reasonably good in identification and also adept at counting. It is not easy to count 35,000 Ibises or 12,500 Godwits - the work is certainly quite taxing.

Being the IBCN State Coordinator for A.P., I had to organize and coordinate the counting this year. Next year, however, we plan to cover more wetlands and involve more members. We have compiled the highlights of our trips which are given below.

CORINGA WLS - 8.1.2011

Photos: Asif Husain



Participants: MS Kulkarni, Asif Husain, Sivaji Anguru, Shafaat Ulla.

The sanctuary is situated at the estuary of the Godavari, near Kakinada. It consists mainly of mangrove forests and is extremely scenic. There are three main channels or tributaries, about 25 - 30 meters wide and about 6 km long that cut through the mangroves before emptying into the sea. The only way to explore this sanctuary is by motor boat. This is an experience in itself - thick and lush green forest overhanging on either side of the river banks. One can go all the way to the sea by one channel and return by the other. We thus covered all the three channels, including a part of the sea. There are narrow cross channels also and it is very exciting exploring them.



At the head of one of the channels, the forest department has built a 'board walk' about a meter high right inside the forest. This half-a-kilometer walk enables one to explore the forest on foot, which is otherwise impenetrable.



Black-capped Kingfisher

We recorded about 53 species, notable being Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) and Western Reef Egret (*Egretta gularis*).



Western Reef Egret

KOLLERU WLS - 22.1.2011

Photos: Shafaat Ulla



Participants: MS Kulkarni, JVD Moorthy, Sivaji Angunu, Shafaat Ulla.

This was our third survey of Kolleru in as many years. It is the largest fresh water lake in India situated near Eluru, West Godavari district. It is a notified Ramsar site and attracts thousands of Ducks, Ibises, Storks, Pelicans and a mind-boggling number and variety of waders. We recorded about 75 species, notable amongst them being the Grey-headed Lapwing (*Vanellus cinereus*) and a lone Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*).



We spent three days in an attempt to cover an area of 308 sq. kms., crisscrossing through villages, in jeeps and in motor and pole boats. We could, however, cover only about 50-60% of the lake and the total count could well exceed about a million birds, at a conservative estimate!

KRISHNA WLS - 25.1.2011

Photos: Shafaat Ulla



Participants: MS Kulkarni, JVD Moorthy, Sivaji Angunu, Shafaat Ulla.

From Kolleru we proceeded to Krishna, via Kuchipudi. This sanctuary also consists of mangroves, situated on the estuary of the Krishna River. The two tributaries are very wide, more than 100 meters at some places, and quite deep. Fishing is a flourishing business. We covered both the rivers in two days in an open motor boat and literally got roasted in the sun. Apart from the rivers, birding in the open sea was also a good experience.



The highlight of our survey was wading on foot through an open area of the mangroves, in gumboots provided by the forest department. This was done to reach an isolated, but beautiful, beach, where Olive Ridley turtles come and lay eggs. The forest department monitors and protects the eggs from jackals and wild boars and the hatchlings from raptors. We, however, could not see any turtles. The beach area turned out to be an excellent for birding area. We recorded about 34 species like Pallas's Gull (*Larus ichthyaetus*), Caspian Terns (*Sterna caspia*) and a suspected Black Baza (*Aviceda leuphotis*). Unidentified waders and terns could exceed 10,000 birds!

MANJIRA WLS - 06.2.2011

Photos: Humayun Taher



Marsh Crocodile

Participants: Shafaat Ulla, Nandakumar, Humayun Taher, Asif Husain.

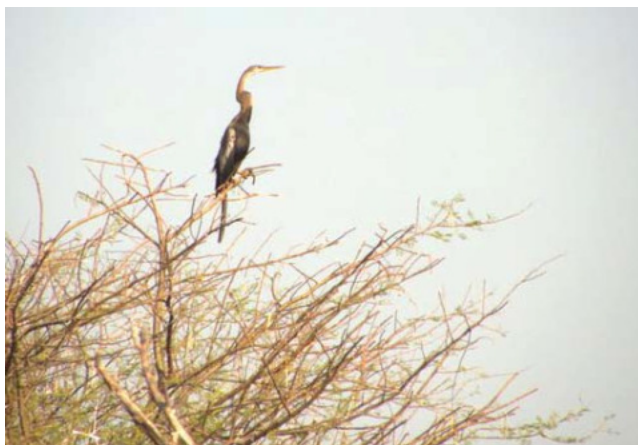
The Manjira/Singur complex and the 36 km stretch of Manjira River between these two barrages comprises the Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary. This area has not been adequately covered in the past. This year, we took permission from the A.P. Forest Department to use their motorised launch to cover the entire stretch. The river banks are favoured basking and nesting spots for the Mugger or Marsh Crocodile, which is the principal protected species in the sanctuary. We saw more than 5 large crocodiles during our trip up the river.

Manjira, with a spread of 20 square kilometers, has several large tree-covered islands that are a flourishing heronry for Painted Storks, Egrets, Black-headed Ibis, Cormorants, Darters, and Herons of many species. With the help of the launch, we were able to cover almost 80% of this lake and the entire stretch of the river between Manjira and Singur. The highlight of our trip was undoubtedly the huge number of ducks and terns we saw. Considering that the number of ducks seen in most of the other sites had been quite disappointing, the 7000 plus ducks at Manjira was quite encouraging. Also noted were several hundred River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*), Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybridus*), Gull-billed Terns (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) and Little Terns (*Sterna albifrons*).



Greater Spotted Eagle

All in all, the entire day yielded more than 12,500 birds of 57 species, which included the rare Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), the magnificent Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) and the vulnerable Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*).



Darter

NELAPATTU WLS - 23.12.2010

Photos: Umesh Mani



Spot-billed Pelican

Participants: Humayun Taher, Umesh Mani, KB Anand, Sreekar R.

Nelapattu and Pulicat have been neglected by BSAP for AWC activities, owing to their distance from Hyderabad. We decided to pay a visit to these places in December 2010 and include it in our exercise.



Spot-billed Pelican with young

Nelapattu is a traditional pelicanry for the Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*). Also using this heronry are Black-headed Ibises (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Asian Openbills (*Anastomus oscitans*), Egrets and Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*). Our visit coincided with the nesting season of the Pelicans and Storks. The herons and egrets had not commenced breeding, but Black-headed Ibises had just started nest-building.



Asian Openbill

The 4.85 sq. km. tank of Nelapattu is a fully protected area and the surrounding scrublands are also part of the wildlife sanctuary. These factors keep the place well-preserved and we observed good numbers of birds here. The highlights were, of course, the nesting Pelicans. We counted more than 850 Spot-billed Pelicans here. The final total of species came to 30, totalling over 3800 birds. We were disappointed at not having spotted the Great Crested Grebe though we looked hard for it. This bird had been spotted here and photographed in December 2008.

PULICAT WLS – 24 AND 25.12.2010

Photos: Umesh Mani



Participants: Humayun Taher, Umesh Mani, KB Anand, Sreekar R.

Pulicat is one of the largest, brackish water lagoons in India; surpassed only by the Chilika Lake. Owing to the presence of the Satish Dhawan Space Center (SHAR/ISRO) on the Sriharikota Island, the area is a highly sensitive zone and security is correspondingly high. However, there are pressures from the fishing folk that live on other islands in the lagoon that depend on the fishing for their livelihood. The lake was, and still continues to be, under tremendous pressure from semi-natural causes. The sand dunes that cut it off from the sea are being slowly eroded and the mouth of the estuary is becoming larger. This causes greater quantities of saline sea water to enter the lake. Due to this, the water's salinity is increasing and affecting the indigenous flora of the lake.



Greater Flamingo

However, for birding purposes, the lake was certainly a wonderful spot. On the road that cuts through the lagoon, going from Sullurpet to the SHAR gate, we saw some wonderful species. Highlights were, naturally, about 200 Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*). Although this is a good number, it is very low by 'Pulicat standards.' More than 1000 Greater Flamingos have been reported during better times. We also saw a flock of about 20 Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*). Several species of waders such as the Little (*Calidris minuta*) and Temminck's Stints (*Calidris temminckii*), Black-tailed Godwits (*Limosa limosa*), hundreds of Gulls and Terns and more than 35000 ducks of assorted species were the highlights. All four species of gulls were seen – Black-headed (*Larus ridibundus*), Brown-headed (*Larus brunnicephalus*), Pallas's (*Larus ichthyaetus*) and Heuglin's Gull (*Larus heuglini*).



Pacific Golden Plover

We also visited the Irrakkam Island, on the Tada side of the lagoon. This was also a wonderful place, where we saw a couple of hundred Pacific Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*) and, most interesting of all, 5 Grey-headed Lapwings (*Vanellus cinereus*). These birds have not been reported from Pulicat and, thus, became a new record for the lake.



Grey-headed Lapwing(Photo: Humayun Taher)

Our trip recorded waterbirds of 68 species, totalling at least some 74000 birds. The bulk of these were ducks, estimated at around 35000, and about 30000 shorebirds of various species.

UPPALAPADU VILLAGE AVIAN REFUGE – 22.1.2011

Participant: Humayun Taher.

This largest (in terms of numbers) known Pelicanry in Andhra Pradesh is a small village-tank covering not more than 6 acres. The original tank was more than 30 acres in extent; but due to intense pressure from the villagers for domestic water purposes, the area is now restricted to 6 acres. This forms the Uppalapadu Avian Refuge.

At the time of this visit, there were more than 870 Pelicans; I counted over 400 nests. The Uppalapadu Lake is not sufficient to offer refuge to this massive population. Nearby tanks are also being used by the Pelicans now. Two of these are Edduri Tank and Garapadu Village Tank (both of these are within 3 km from the main Uppalapadu tank and are included in the counts for Uppalapadu). The visit also yielded over 400 Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*). Asian Openbill Storks (*Anastomus oscitans*) had already completed their nesting and were not seen in large numbers – only some 40 were sighted on all three lakes.



Photo: Humayun Taher

Uppalapadu, being almost completely taken over by the Pelicans, does not have large populations of ducks and teals on it. A total of some 90 duck and teal were counted on all three lakes together. The largest concentration was at the Garapadu Village Tank, where some 40 ducks were counted, mostly Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*) and a few Lesser Whistling Teal (?).

The three-lake complex yielded about 2000 birds of 43 species.

ICRISAT ASIA CENTER – 30.1.2011

Photos: Humayun Taher



Participant: Humayun Taher.

Over the years, ICRISAT has been a very rewarding avian refuge. The water bodies in the center are favourite haunts of wintering waterfowl and have provided several surprises and interesting observations in the past. This particular count exercise was performed along with a BSAP trip to the site so I had several ‘associates’ to help with the counting.

The lakes on the campus comprise the Campus Settling Ponds, the ICRISAT Lake, the Patancheru Lake and the Red Lakes. The Patancheru Lake lies just outside the campus and the boundary fence of the campus skirts the eastern end of the lake. Consequently it also comes within the confines of the ICRISAT complex, for purposes of the waterfowl counts. There are some interesting marshes inside the campus near this lake. Opposite the Red Lakes are some rice paddies that also provide excellent sightings of many waders, particularly Ruff and Sandpipers. The entire area is about 1400 hectares.



Painted Stork

There were many interesting sightings at ICRISAT, including nesting Painted Storks and Grey Herons; all three species of Ibis and about 575 ducks of various species. Of particular interest were a few Common Teal in the mixed flock of ducks. A solitary

Spot-billed Pelican seems to be almost a permanent resident at the ICRISAT Lake – he has been seen here regularly for the past few years, ever since he arrived as an injured bird, 4 years ago.

1090 birds of 41 species are numbers that do not really do justice to the ICRISAT center. But this year has been most disappointing in terms of ducks. Places where they abounded are strangely empty; probably because of the excessive, unnatural rains that the south experienced during October, November and December of 2010. These rains have filled up tanks and lakes which were previously dry and I feel that the ducks have scattered across these seasonal tanks and are not congregating as they used to do in previous seasons. The exercise next year should have some interesting figures, to substantiate or disprove this observation.

PALMAKOLE TANK – 16.1.2011

Photos: Humayun Taher

Participants: Shafaat Ulla, Anjali Pande, Humayun Taher.

Covering an area of about 12 acres, Palmakole is a small tank close to Shamshabad. It was a regular haunt of the BSAP in days gone by but has been neglected of late. The tank is surrounded by fields and scrubland which holds considerable avian fauna of the scrubland type. Larks and pipits are well-represented here.



Small Pratincole

Our visit was late in the morning and therefore the heat was fierce. Possibly as a result of this, and also owing to the general paucity of ducks in the south this year, we saw very few. However, about 200 Lesser Whistling Teal were seen, which was cheering. The more interesting sightings at this lake, however, were the Kentish Plovers (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) and a large number of Small Pratincoles (*Glareola lactea*). There was a small mudflat within the lake, a few feet from the shore. On this mudbank, there were more than 20 Small Pratincoles gathered together and basking in small depressions in the mud. This was the highlight of the trip to the site. Palmakole, in previous seasons has produced Bar-headed Geese (I think in the late 1990's). It remains to be seen how the next year count will be on this site. There is good cover in the lake so there is no reason why it should not be able to hold ducks in fair numbers.

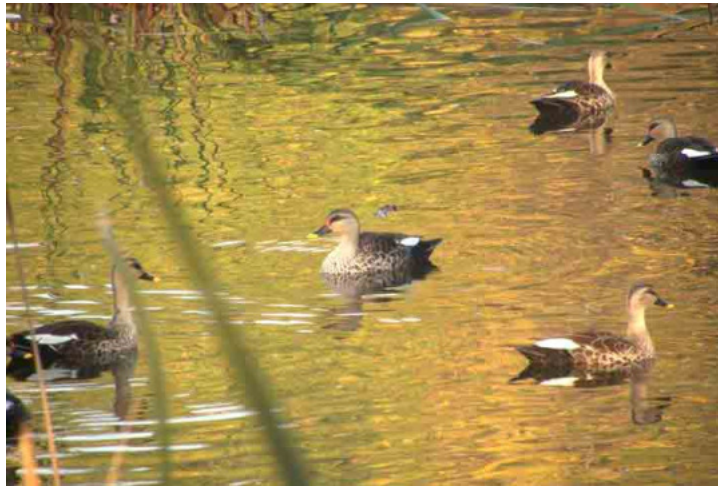
A total of 450 birds were sighted, comprising about 22 species, at this site, with the Pratincoles being the highlights.

HUSSAIN SAGAR LAKE – 16.1.2011

Photos: Humayun Taher

Participants: Shafaat Ulla, Anjali Pande, Humayun Taher.

Situated within the confines of the sprawling city of Hyderabad, this large man-made lake used to be a very good birding spot years ago. Since then, excessive disturbance and a great increase in the pollution levels have made this lake extremely distressing. The waters are now black with pollutants and there is hardly any fish-life left. Tourism boats ply in the lake and a busy road, running all around the boundary of the lake adds to the disturbances. The only bright spot is the Sanjeevaiah Park, which is a municipal park situated in a plot of land that juts into the lake. This provides some refuge to the avian fauna of the place.



Spot-billed Duck

Due to the massive pollution levels, our counts were expectedly low. The more interesting sightings were a few Indian River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) and a single Brown-headed Gull (*Larus brunnicephalus*) flying over the waters. Common Coots (*Fulica atra*) and Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) were in large numbers (Coots particularly are very numerous on this lake). About 40 odd Spot-billed Ducks were observed in a small pond within Sanjeevaiah Park, but very few were seen on the actual Hussain Sagar Lake. In previous years, Northern Shovellers (*Anas clypeata*) used to be seen in the thousands on this lake; this year we could spot only about 7, with a few Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) interspersed.



Common Coot

The absence of birds is almost entirely due to excessive pollution and great disturbances in the periphery of the lake. There are large beds of the Water Hyacinth. This pest has acquired a good hold of the area on the western side of the Sanjeevaiah Park. A mammoth effort is now required to save this lake.



Indian Pond Heron

Our trip showed around 21 species of waterbirds, totaling some 400 birds.

OSMAN SAGAR & HIMAYAT SAGAR - 15.1.2011

Participants: Anjali Pande, Sivaji Anguru, Asif Husain, Shafaat Ulla.

We first surveyed the tanks from the bunds. Both of them are full to the brim because of good rains we have had and there was not a bird in sight. We therefore decided to go to the back waters of the lakes.

For Osman Sagar, we went past Treasure Island and after about ten kms., we took a left turn for Vatvalapalli. The ducks and waders were conspicuous by their absence, except a few here and there. However, we counted about 190 Brown-headed Gulls and about 30 River Terns. Total count was about 27 species.

For Himayat Sagar, we went past Chilkur, on the Vikarabad Road and turned left for Aziz Nagar. We drove for a few kms where we met the backwaters. Here too the story was the same. There were very few waders and absolutely no ducks. Worth mentioning were 30 Glossy Ibises, 45 Ruffs and more than 170 Coots. Totally we counted 24 species.

Both the areas are good for birding as there is large variety of birds, apart from wetland birds. It would be worthwhile visiting these areas for BSAP outdoor trips.

For Private Circulation Only

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 7 July 2011

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 17th July 2011, 6:00AM: Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest.

With the monsoons in full swing and great weather prevailing, the day should make, not only, for a pleasant woodland walk, but also great birding. Ananthgiri has never disappointed and is a paradise for forest birds. One can see Flycatchers, White Eyes, Chloropsis, the Orange-headed Ground Thrush, Nightjars, among others. The Indian Pitta and the Brown Fish Owl have been reported earlier.

This half-day trip promises to be a pleasant outing. Carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: Life of Birds

Thursday, 21st July 2011, 6PM: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

Colourful, mysterious, noble and intriguing, birds have fascinated us since the dawn of history. With the series *The Life of Birds*, David Attenborough, one of the world's foremost naturalists, hosts an extraordinary exploration into the secret lives of these magnificent creatures.

The Limits of Endurance: Birds manage to survive in the most hostile environment on Earth - from the hottest deserts to the most barren and frigid polar zones, and even in the newest of all habitats - human cities.

Trip Report – Hyderabad Central University – 19th June 2011

Didugu Mohitha Sree



Grey Heron (Photo: Anand KB)

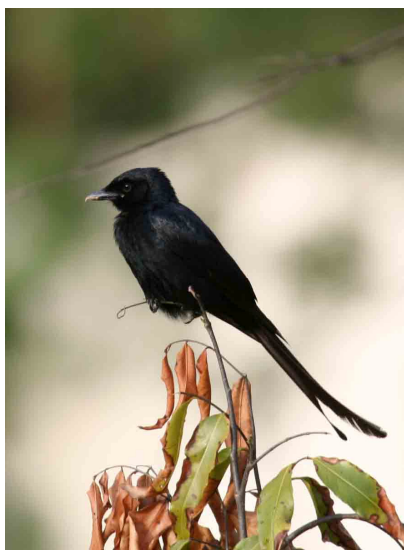
With his black nose all over my jeans, his tail wagging furiously, his liquid eyes full of excitement, his pink tongue hanging out of his mouth displaying his sharp canines, he totally entangled me and I couldn't move an inch. He is Chinnu, an off-white Labrador retriever, 4 to 5 years old, returning home from his morning walk. I had to

go, though I didn't want to leave my new friend. By the time I slipped into the car, Humayun sir, Surekha mam and Mr. Rishi were already seated and waiting for me. We had to go and join the group who were at the lake. I felt a gush of excitement as I had felt on my first trip.

We joined the rest of the group. The participation for this trip was unusually high with about 30 members turning up. Dr. Rao, Professor of Botany in Hyderabad University, was our official guide. We were joined by the Greater Hyderabad Adventure Club members. A stray mongrel also came along. I named him Shadow as he followed the group everywhere.

Then we were at Gundlakunta (known so due to the presence of large number of rocks all round the lake) or Buffalo lake (known so due to the number of buffaloes visiting the lake). We, however, didn't see any buffaloes!

There were a good number and variety of birds. One of the first birds I saw was the Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*) with its white supercilium and bronze-green body. Then came the call 'Did you do it' from the flying Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*). An Indian River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*) was also hovering around. In the lake there were Cotton Teals (*Nettapus coromandelianus*), Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Indian Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*) and Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*). A few Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*), Indian Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*) and White Ibises (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) were also seen. On the water side, four kinds of Egrets – Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Great Egret (*Ardea alba*), Intermediate Egret (*Egretta intermedia*) and Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) were seen.



Black Drongo (Photo: Anand KB)

Great excitement spread over the group when the Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) flew in to showcase his fishing skills and beauty. The white supercilium and the black breastband were clearly visible. He dived into the water a number of times - though unsuccessful in getting a meal,

he didn't deter from his efforts. Meanwhile, the Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*) were ready for their breakfast as they cornered their feed to the edge of the lake. A single Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) sat by on a far off tree top with his long thin neck recoiled and this created a bit of confusion in identifying it. A Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*) flew by not giving us enough time for a good glimpse. The call of the Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) was heard, though I was not fortunate enough to see this magnificent bird. Then, Shafaat sir asked us to move on and we all went to the other side of the lake.

On the way I saw a Green Bee-Eater (*Merops orientalis*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*), Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*), Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Leptocoma zeylonica*) and Pale-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*). We reached the other side of the lake and I found it very beautiful. Above us was a canopy of trees and as we went down the slope we could see the lake through the branches. We saw the birds closely.

We moved towards the nursery, Shadow following us. The call of an Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopaceus*) and Indian Peafowl were heard. Just then a White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) flew by. We (Humayun sir, Bindu and me, along with another member) followed the call of the Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*), which was playing hide and seek with us. It turned out to be very good at hiding and we being poor seekers, couldn't find him.



Indian Silverbill (Photo: Anand KB)

By the time we joined the group we found that we had missed watching the interesting courting behaviour of the Indian Silverbills (*Lonchura malabarica*). We had a look at the pictures though.

Spotted Doves (*Streptopelia chinensis*) and White-browed Wagtails (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) were also spotted. Just then, out of nowhere, a langur with its long tail in the air ran by. According to Humayun sir, its baby was hanging down from its belly. I couldn't see the baby langur though. We went into the nursery which was well maintained and on the way back saw a Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*). An Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*) was also seen along with an unidentified lark.

Then we went back to the place where the cars were parked and munched few sandwiches. Shadow too ate a bit and fell asleep. Now, before Shadow got up, we moved onto the Masthankunta or Peacock Lake. We saw Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*), Little Grebes, Great Egret (*Ardea alba*), Red-wattled Lapwings, Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*) and Spot-billed Ducks. A few munias flew by. House swifts (*Apus affinis*) and Ashy Prinia were also seen. Then Shafaat sir showed us a Rock Agama. With bright orange coloured upperparts and black underparts and scar over the eye, it shied away from the photographers. By then a Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur*

indus) flew by. A Darter was drying its wings standing on a stone in the middle of the lake. Then as we moved back to the cars, a Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) showed up. It is supposed to be a brood-parasite. This bird is a migrant and its sighting announces the arrival of monsoon (it's called Papiha in Hindi). A Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) was also seen.

Lastly, we went to have a look at a Menhir (In French: 'men' - long, 'hir' - stone) of the Megalithic period (Pre-metallic period i.e. before Iron Age) of around 2400 BC. There was a community burial ground facing north, around 4400 years old. The inhabitants must have been Dravidians who migrated to the Deccan plateau when invaded by the Aryans. Identified and protected since the British period, it had been excavated 6 years ago, revealing that they had a good knowledge of agriculture and cooking (millets were mostly cultivated and the evidence of cooking was the earthen pots, terracotta). After this informative sight we called it a day.

The birding was very satisfactory and the weather co-operated! All in all is was an eventful and exciting outing!

Report – Indoor Meeting – Life of Birds (The Problems of Parenting) – 23rd June 2011

Shafaat Ulla

The penultimate episode, 'The Problems of Parenting' in the Life of the Birds series screened at the German Centre, was most interesting, and excellently picturised; about the demanding business of raising chicks. Most birds are exemplary parents and fully devoted to their offspring – however there are a few exceptions as you will see from this note.

Let us start with *Great Crested Grebes*. When the chicks hatch, they are fed with a few small feathers which the little ones swallow as if they were some tasty morsel. This thankfully is followed by a regular meal of fish. It was explained that the feathers line the stomach to protect it from sharp fish bones. The adults also swallow their own feathers once in a while, regularly. Well, what about Cormorants, Kingfishers, Ospreys, etc.? A moot point.

We now come to *Openbill Storks* of Thailand. When the chicks hatch, they need to be kept cool. Parents bring copious amounts of water in their crops and shower the chicks with it. If this is not enough, under the hot mid-day sun, they take turns shading the chicks with their wide open wings, as if holding up an umbrella.

We learnt something about the *Coots* also which we find in plenty in our city. When the chicks are hatched, they are enticed by the parents with tiny food morsels to come

out of the nest and to jump into the water. When all the chicks are collected, the brood consisting mostly of about seven to eight chicks, is taken around the lake and fed devotedly. However from the third day, the punishment starts. It is usually concentrated on one of the chicks, who is mercilessly and repeatedly pecked till it stops begging for food. Very cruel indeed and with the result it starves to death. This is repeated again and again on other chicks and finally the pair raises two or three chicks only.

The *Brown Pelicans* of Florida normally lay three eggs and all the eggs hatch successfully. However the eldest chick always fights with the smaller siblings and finally ejects them from the nest one by one, sending them to their deaths. Finally only one chick fledges. It is an insurance policy to lay more than one egg, as the situation may be different if the food supply is plentiful.

Coming to Cuckoos, we all know that they are 'brood parasites' – that means that they lay their eggs in some other bird's nest and totally wash their hands off their parental duties. The *European Cuckoo* chooses the nest of the Reed Warbler. It comes to the nest and to make room, steals two eggs out of the four, eats them and lays its own single egg, which is a perfect match with the warbler's eggs.

The cuckoo egg hatches about four days earlier than that of the babbler and the chick is naked and blind. Now instinct takes over: the little fellow expertly manoeuvres one egg onto its back and balancing it expertly, wiggles in reverse till the egg is toppled out of the nest. Similarly the other egg is also thrown out, competition thus eliminated totally. The poor warbler brings up the cuckoo chick successfully and at the time of fledging it is more than twice the size of the warbler.

Cuckoos are not the only brood parasites – there are six other species. One of them is the *Cuckoo Duck* of Argentina. These ducks lay a solitary egg in the nest of Brown-headed Gulls. When the eggs are hatched, one is the gull's chick and the other a cute little duckling. It immediately takes to the water, feeding and fending for itself. It never sees its parents as they never saw theirs.

British Columbia is the breeding ground for the *Golden Eye* ducks. They normally nest in woodpecker's holes and lay about eight to ten eggs. When the eggs hatch the fledglings drop about three to four meters to the ground and are led to the lake by the mother for feeding. However if there happens to be another Golden Eye with a similar brood – yes, a territorial battle starts. The two mothers are extremely aggressive and start fighting tooth and nail till one is defeated and flees the lake, for good, leaving its entire brood behind. It is a happy ending as the motherless ducklings join the other group and are accepted by the new mother as her own and the whole

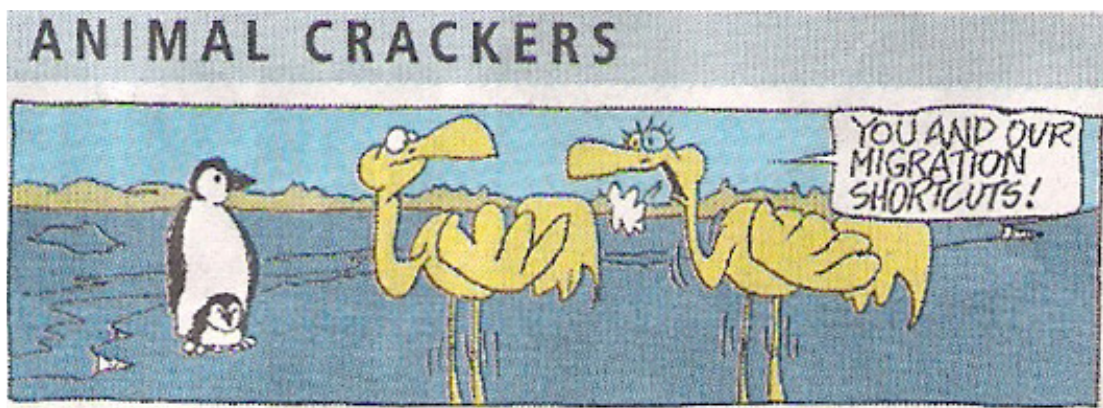
family is brought up, sometimes exceeding twenty ducklings.

The *Magpie Goose* of North Australia is quite enterprising. The male mates with two females and both lay eggs and take turns incubating. When the goslings hatch, about seven to ten normally, the gander along with his two wives protects, feeds and brings up the brood. However some chicks are lost to sea eagles, in spite of the three parents protecting together.

The *Gouldian Finches* of Australia nest in holes which are pitch dark inside, with the result it would normally not be possible for the parents to see the chicks properly. Nature therefore has a solution: the chicks have vividly coloured white and blue spots around the gape of the beaks, which are faintly luminescent. When the finch enters the nesting hole, the chicks feel the vibrations and open their mouths wide which enable the parents to locate the hungry mouths for feeding.

The Arctic Tundra is a flat expanse and during the summer it is a profusion of green grass and flowering shrubs and is the breeding ground for the *Brant Goose* as also the *Snowy Owl*, both ground nesters. The geese cleverly nest next to the owl, which is a powerful and ferocious neighbour. It fights off predator foxes and offers free protection to the geese that successfully bring up their young, although some casualties cannot be avoided. Just like the Indian Golden Oriole nests near a nesting Black Drongo, and benefits from the latter's pugnacity.

Bird Humour



(From The Times of India, 30-04-2011)

**INTERPLAY BETWEEN
A RED-VENTED BULBUL AND A PIED CRESTED CUCKOO**
Some observations during the BSAP Field Trip to Hyderabad University Campus, – 19th June 2011
Humayun Taher

During the recent BSAP Field Trip to the campus of the University of Hyderabad on 19th June 2011, we observed a Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) near a water body known as Peacock Lake. While observing and photographing the bird, we observed a Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), making a dive at the cuckoo as though attacking it. We thought that it was possible that the bulbul was trying to prevent the cuckoo from parasitizing its nest, which may be in the vicinity. With this object, we searched the area and, particularly, the bush where we saw the birds, but could not discover a nest in the vicinity. Shortly afterwards, the Cuckoo left the bush and flew into a thickly foliated tree where we could no longer see it.

This has reference to the interplay between the Pied Crested Cuckoo and the Red-vented Bulbul. I was curious as to whether there was any reference to this relationship in known literature. All the literature I remembered, said that the Pied Crested Cuckoo is almost exclusively brood parasitic on the *Turdoides* species of Babblers.

On returning home, I studied the Handbook on the subject and found that Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley make no mention of it being brood-parasitic on the Red-vented or any other species of Bulbul. The Handbook draws reference to Stuart Baker's "Fauna of British India", Vol. 4 but, when I checked this source, Stuart Baker mentions that the bird almost exclusively is brood parasitic on Babblers. He goes on to say that there is very little information of the bird being brood parasitic on any other species.

That said, I did some search on the internet and here is what Wikipedia has to say on the subject: "Other hosts include the Red-vented Bulbul, and the eggs laid are then mostly white." ... This reference comes from a note in the Journal of the BNHS (Vol. 24, pp. 821-822) by B.B. Osmaston (1916).

This is about the only record of the bird nesting in a Bulbul nest (at least in India), though it seems a fairly common occurrence in the African birds. I leave it to conjecture whether the bird we saw was attempting anything of this sort.

Another reference that seems to relate to this is a paper entitled "Breeding Biology of the Cape Bulbul *Pycnonotus capensis*: a 40 year comparison", by an O. Kruger. I found this by typing Pied Crested Cuckoo in Google search. I could not find the actual paper, but the fact that the Bulbul is mentioned in the title when I was actually searching for Pied Crested Cuckoo seems to me to be significant.

So, bearing the above in mind, it is probable that the Pied Crested Cuckoo we saw on Sunday was, in fact, searching for the Redvented Bulbul nest, or knew that it was around, and probably had designs on it. I would not, of course, claim this as a certainty but the probability seems to lie in that direction.

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Small Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*)



Small Pratincole (Himayatsagar, 17-01-2009)

Order: Charadriiformes

Family: Glareolidae


Genus: *Glareola*

Species: *G. lactea*

Size: 16-19 cm

Description: The Small Pratincole is also known as Little Pratincole or Small Indian Pratincole. It is one of the small waders and has short legs, a short, square-ended tail, white belly, long pointed wings, and a brown crown on the head. It has a short bill which is suitable for aerial feeding. While on the ground, it looks mainly sandy grey. The wings are grey above with black primaries, and the trailing edge of inner flight feathers show black-and-white barring. Underwings are mainly black. The tail is white with a terminal black triangle, which can look like a black tail band in flight. The adult breeding bird has black lores and a buff wash to the throat, which are missing in the non-breeding adults. Instead, the non-breeding adult shows streaks on the throat. The juvenile shows indistinct buff fringes and brown sub-terminal marks on the upperparts.

Behaviour: The Small Pratincole is usually seen in flocks in open country, near large rivers or lakes, especially those

with sand or shingle banks. While foraging, they walk around the damp ground near the edges of the waterbodies, looking for insects. They may also probe the mud with their bills. Their most unusual feature is that though classified as waders, they typically hunt insects (their main diet) on the wing, like swallows. In flight, due to their small size, they may be confused with swallows or swifts, especially as the Pratincoles may also show small forks in their tails. (In fact, at one time they used to be known as Small Swallow-plovers). The birds can sometimes be noisy, with shrill, piercing whistle-like calls. (The call can be heard here).  Populations are resident or local migrants.

Nesting: The Small Pratincole nests from December to March. The nest is just a shallow scrape in the ground, in the gravel or sand banks beside the rivers or waterbodies which are their habitat. The clutch consists of 2-4 eggs.

Local name: It is known as 'bauni tatihri' in Punjabi, 'chhota babuibatan' in Bengali, 'nanu thejpar' in Gujarati and 'kuruvi ulla' in Tamil.

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 8 August 2011

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 21st August 2011, 6:00AM: Shamirpet Lake.

Some 20km away from Secunderabad, on the Hyderabad-Karimnagar highway, is this lovely man-made lake, which is an excellent spot for birding. The large freshwater source and the surrounding rocky grassy terrain make this ideal for water birds as well as larks. The Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark and the Syke's Crested Lark have been seen here. The place has yielded Yellow-wattled Lapwings as well.

This half-day trip promises to be a pleasant outing. Carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: Winged Migration

Thursday, 18th August 2011, 6PM: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

This documentary follows several species of migratory birds over a four-year filming period. These birds travel several hundreds, if not thousands, of miles toward the equator in the autumn, and make the return journey to their higher latitude summer homes in the spring, always taking the same route, using the natural compasses of the universe - the stars, to find their way. Some species, like the Arctic Tern, even fly from pole to pole. Survival depends upon these long and often arduous flights, an effort to live in a hospitable climate and find sources of food. With the exception of migratory penguins, travel over oceans is especially difficult as the birds have little refuge, unless there is something floating on the water, such as a ship, on which to land. Otherwise they must continue flying until they reach land. Some may not survive the migration, either due to predators, which include man, or illness or injury...

OF BIRDS AND TREES

Trip Report – Ananthagiri – 19th June 2011

Surekha Aitabathula

Massive, strong and magnanimous are its trees. Sun-defeating and showcasing the choicest shades of green are their wide, arching canopies. In these canopies live winged denizens of all shapes, sizes and colours. And to gape at these winged denizens come the birdwatchers to Ananthagiri forest.

The drive to Ananthagiri and the vision of its enormous trees and the numerous birds is a soul liberating experience for me! Not to forget the cheerful early morning camaraderie, smiles, handshakes and introductions over a cuppa tea. Birding begins in an atmosphere of warmth and enthusiasm.



Photo: Mustafa Zaidi

Which birds would grace the occasion that morning - was the question on our minds. Almost in answer came a pair of Red-rumped Swallows (*Hirundo daurica*) collecting mud from little puddles left by the overnight rain. This was my first sighting of these birds. They are said to build quarter-sphere nests with a tunnel-shaped entrance lined with mud collected in their beaks (which was exactly what they were doing when we saw them)! These nests are usually built under cliff overhangs or under bridges, ceilings of buildings etc. Set me thinking. Why isn't the human house construction activity as surreal as that of the birds?

Also surreal it was to watch the Common Tailorbird's (*Orthotomus sutorius*) leaf nest. The tailorbird uses plant fibre to pierce and sew the edges of two large leaves together to make a cradle in which it builds the actual grass nest. I was awestruck to say the least! What a neat job of sewing it did! A seamstress *par excellence* of the bird kingdom. Tailorbirds have short, rounded wings, a tail which is typically held upright, a sharp and curved bill that doubles up as the world's best needle. Set me thinking yet again. Who taught the tailorbird to sew? God? I would love to believe that this is the correct answer but is it? Another question knocked. When the tailorbird was sewing together the edges of the two leaves, say on the right side, who held the left side steady? I instructed myself to stop analysing and simply enjoy the sublime physics and architecture that some birds seemed to have mastered.

The day was like a babbler festival. There were plenty of Jungle (*Turdoides striatus*) and Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*) strutting around. All alone, on a bare tree, sat a Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) giving our lensmen birders ample time to photograph it. The body is a beautiful shade of cinnamon with a black head and a long graduated tail. We spotted a Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*). Its call is sheer melody, one that often alerts birdwatchers to its presence. This bird sports an incredible yellow underside. The yellow that probably meets its match only on a Golden Oriole amongst the birds that I have seen!

We went past the ancient Ananthapadmanabha Swamy temple and walked down the broad steps into the inviting forest. My friend Sagarika pointed out the White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*) to me. This bird with its dark brown upperparts and white spots on the wings kept its tail fanned out as I observed it through my binoculars! Made me wonder if it ever closes its fan-like tail that looked exactly like shuttlecock feathers fanned out!

And then there were the regulars such as the Common Myna (*Acridotheres tritis*), a bird that has adapted extremely well to urban environments, Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), House Swift (*Apus affinis*) and the Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*).

As we went deep inside we were privy to more and more visual treats in form of huge old trees. The dense barks were damp and this added to their beauty. Their prop roots seemed to stand forever in silent support. The tree seems to know exactly how many prop roots it needs and how to position them so as to maintain its equilibrium and distribute its massive weight. No tree in this world has fallen yet because it lost its centre of gravity! There is perfect symmetry in nature. The way the branches of a tree rise outwards and upwards in precise geometrical balance is remarkably amazing. They rise as gracefully as the arms of a dancer striking a sensuous pose.

Amongst one such tree's dense foliage, we spotted an Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) easily identifiable, thanks to its distinctive white ring around the eye. We also spotted a Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) chiseling out a hole in the tree to build its nest. The contrasting colours on this bird are fascinating - a red forehead, a yellow eye ring, a yellow throat patch and a red collar, streaked undersides and green upperparts.

Special mention here to one of my favourite birds - the Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*). I had gone a little ahead, when my friends called out to me to come right back and watch the lovely woodpecker. Perched right on top of a tall tree, I could see that its golden yellow wing coverts justified its name (this bird is also known as the Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker). It has a red crown and crest, a stiff tail to provide support when it sits against a tree trunk and two toes pointing forward and two backward for that perfect grip!

On my first birding trip in May 2010 to the Nehru Zoological Park, I happened to be clean-bowled by the Flameback, which was consistently tapping the tree with its strong beak. A loud and sharp sound that went 'tuk tuk tuk' had sliced the silence of the Zoo back then. And now a full year later, I see the Flameback here in Ananthagiri again! It was almost as if the Flameback was saying, "Happy First Birding Anniversary and Many Happy Returns".

It is a sign I tell you! It is a happy sign!

Trip Report – Narsapur – 5th June 2011

Humayun Taher, Umesh Mani, K.B. Anand

Photos: Humayun Taher

After the surprise sighting of the Sooty Tern in a rather unplanned and impromptu trip, it seems that the impromptu trips bug has bitten deep. Conscious and smarting from the bite, we decided to run down to Narsapur forest for a day and see what was to be had. Accordingly, we left the city early in the morning of the 5th June and headed out to Narsapur.

Arriving at the temple (having stopped en route for tea as usual), we found the usual suspects waiting for us: Black Drongo, Little Minivets and Brahminy Starlings are always seen in the area, as also the Black-rumped Flameback. What we missed however, were the little woodpeckers. Neither the Brown-crowned Pygmy nor the Mahratta Woodpecker was seen on this trip. What we did see was a very strange Cuckoo playing hide-and-seek. Our heart was in the cause of identification and so we

pursued it with grim determination, snapping here and there a picture. Alas, all our efforts came to no avail and the bird remains unidentified. I have a strong suspicion that we were looking at the Indian Cuckoo, but I will not stress my point because I am not sure. Suspicion is not sufficient grounds for a positive ID.

Sadly giving up the chase, in the process of which we saw the Scaly-breasted Munia and the Indian Silverbills, we continued alongside the stream towards the lake. Along the way, there were other sights to see: A Changeable Hawk-Eagle, one of the pair that nests on the hill, was calling and soon came soaring overhead. He was followed soon after by a Short-toed Snake Eagle. We saw Indian Robins hopping around, collecting nesting material and no doubt the breeding season is in full swing.



Black-headed Cuckoo Shrike pair

We soon had proof that it is not only the Indian Robins that are thinking of house and home. A short walk into the bush revealed a male Black-headed Cuckoo Shrike sitting composedly on a scrubby little tree and regarding us with grave suspicion. The reason for his suspicions became clear a moment later when the female arrived with something in her beak and suddenly both birds began to behave very oddly. It took us a few moments to realize that they were actually engaged in building their nest. The female brought in some odds and ends and the male reciprocated, and both became very busy incorporating their contributions into the nest and smoothing it down, in readiness to receive their offspring. Avoiding disturbing the birds too much, we discreetly retired.

Returning to the car, breakfast was discussed; so it was off to the village to find a suitable hostelry and quell the pangs of hunger. Having completed this important exercise, we returned to the temple and this time, decided to take the stream-bed on the side opposite to the temple and walk along it. Humayun remembers sightings of Indian Pitta and Orange-headed Ground Thrush from this area, and we were hoping they would oblige us again. Naturally enough, nothing of the sort was forthcoming...



Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (female)

We lowered ourselves into the stream-bed and, trying hard to keep from crunching the dry leaves that profusely

littered the dry stream-bed, we proceeded upstream. A little further on, a movement on our left alerted us to a female Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, searching and scrabbling around among some rootlets. When we saw her picking up beakfuls of grass and twigs, the objective was quite apparent - she was engaged in building her own nest. We lowered ourselves to the ground and, because the bird seemed quite undisturbed by our presence, we managed to obtain some quite decent photographs, notwithstanding that the bird was operating in a place where light was penetrating only with some difficulty, owing to the overhanging roots of the giant tree on the banks of the stream. We were somewhat surprised by the total indifference that this bird showed to our presence so close to where she was undoubtedly building her little home.



Common Iora

Continuing on our way, Anand spotted a Crested Serpent Eagle sitting on a tree; unfortunately the Eagle saw him almost at the same time and all that Umesh and Humayun got was a brief glimpse of a brown shadow plunging deeper into the woods. At this point, there are some noble old trees in the stream-bed and one of these gave us a fleeting glimpse of a Brown Fish Owl. I had known that there used to be a pair inhabiting this place but had not seen them for a long time. It is heartening to know that they are still around. Unfortunately, we only saw the one brief glimpse, sufficient to identify the bird, but not enough to get photographs, much to our disgust. Further along, owing to a general tendency towards liquefaction, we betook ourselves to convenient stones on the stream-bed and sat down to catch breath.

At this point, a Grey Hornbill began to take a great deal of interest in us and on a large tree nearby. Suspecting a Hornbill nest, we assiduously investigated the tree but never a sign did we get. No doubt the nest is there: but the tree and the Hornbill kept their secret well.

Deciding to return, we took a roundabout sort of route and were treated to a pair of Changeable Hawk Eagles soaring at a great height, chivvied by a small bird which looked like a Shikra but was too far away to make out, the more so because we only succeeded in seeing it in silhouette and plumage is not easy to tell at that height. Further along, we met up with Common Wood-shrikes and Large Grey Cuckoo-shrikes, as well as Ashy, Grey-breasted and Plain Prinias. A flycatcher-like bird was seen for a brief instant, but could not be identified. White-bellied Drongo and White-browed Bulbuls, of course, were strident in their dislike of us and, to confuse matters, a Jerdon's Chloropsis on the top of a nearby tree began to imitate the calls of the Shikra. We called his bluff and soon reached the road.

Visiting Narsapur is not quite complete without a visit to the lake, so thither we repaired, only stopping on the way to fortify ourselves with a cuppa. Having reached the lake, and found that it had shrunk a great deal, we were somewhat cheered to see a small group of Asian Openbills in attendance, accompanied by a few Painted Storks. A couple of Black-headed Ibises were also keeping the storks company, along with some Grey Herons and Large Egrets. A Black Ibis flew close to us and Humayun went off in pursuit to get a photograph. Anand saw a large raptor in the distance, which turned out to be a Short-toed Snake Eagle. Having satisfied himself with a good, long look at it, he then hastened after Humayun while Umesh remained near the car, peering through the scope at the storks.



Broken-wing display of the Little Ringed Plover

Having photographed the Ibis, we saw a small wader running around and identified it as the Little Ringed Plover. Anxious to get a good look at the Painted Storks, we were slowly moving towards them when the plover returned and, dropping to the ground in front of us, began the well-known broken-wing display. This is a sure sign that we were standing close to either the eggs or the chicks. So we immediately stopped and subjected the ground around us to a minute scrutiny but nothing could

we see. Meanwhile the Plover continued to run in front of us with her tail raised and her wings drooping. Then she suddenly flew off and, gliding overhead, she disappeared towards where a thin trickle of water led into the lake.

In the meantime, after seeing all this action through the scope, Umesh had walked over and joined us. We photographed the storks, noting a pair of Indian River Terns basking on the sandbank where the storks were and turned towards the car. As we came close to where we had last seen the Little Ringed Plover, we saw it scuttling towards cover *accompanied by a tiny chick*. Suddenly the chick stopped, squatted, and vanished! We spread out and quartered the ground, searching for it, while the adult started to droop her wings and run around in front of us, trying to catch our attention. We concentrated on the ground where we had seen the chick squat. He was right there, in front of us... so beautifully blending into his surroundings that he was all but invisible, until we finally saw it: then we wondered how we could have missed it.



Little Ringed Plover chick

The little chap could not have been more than a week or so old. A frantic photo operation followed, because we could not afford to be around the chick too long. That would have attracted crows, herons or other predators. So a few photos, during which time the adult bird continued to run around in circles, still trailing her wings, and then we left the chick to his devices and retreated. Turning around from a distance, I saw the mother rejoin her offspring and lead it off in the direction of a small tuft of tall grass close to the lake shore.

The day was now well advanced and, well cheered with our sightings, we turned homewards treating ourselves to another cuppa along the way. As to the list, 73 species in some 6 hours is not bad going by any standards, given that most of the species are actually woodland birds which are traditionally difficult to see. We should all go on these impromptu trips more often...!

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Eurasian Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*)



Eurasian Eagle Owl (Chennai, 08-12-2009)

Order: Strigiformes
Family: Strigidae
Genus: *Bubo*
Species: *B. bubo*
Size: 56-66 cm

Description: With a wingspan of 138-200 cm (55-79 inches) and a weight of 1.5-4.5kg (1.5-3.2 kg for males, 1.75-4.5 kg for females), the Eurasian Eagle Owl is possibly the largest owl in the world. Besides its size, it has distinctive ear tufts and orange eyes. The upperparts are brown-black to tawny-buff, which shows as dense spotting on the forehead and crown, stripes on the nape, sides and back of the neck, and dark splotches on the paler back, mantle and scapulars. A narrow, freckled buff band runs up from the base of the bill, above the inner part of the eye and along the inner edge of the black-brown ear tufts. The tawny-buff facial disc has black-brown speckling, which is so dense on the outer edge of the disc that it looks like a 'frame' around the face. The white of the chin and throat continue down the centre of the upper breast. The rest of the underparts is covered with fine, dark wavy barring. Legs and feet are well-feathered. The tail is tawny-buff, mottled grey-brown with about six black-brown bars. This plumage may vary a bit between different subspecies. The bill and talons are black. The irises are deep orange or golden (yellow in some subspecies).

Behaviour: The Eurasian Eagle Owl has a strong, direct flight, with shallow wing beats and long, fast glides. Active during dawn and dusk, it does also hunt during day at

times. It hunts mainly in forests but prefers open areas. It hunts by surprise, attacking its prey while flying low from the ground or above the treetops. It may also capture sleeping birds in rocky crevices and even fish (after an Osprey-like dive into water). The normal diet, though, is small mammals like rats, mice and hares. The preferred habitat of the Eurasian Eagle Owl is rocky areas, with cliffs and mountains abutting woodland, though it may be found in a variety of other habitats. It is territorial, but there may be slight overlaps without a problem. Pairs often remain together for life. The Eurasian Eagle Owl is resident in most parts of their range. The call of the Eurasian Eagle Owl is a deep, resonant 'ooh-hu' with emphasis on the first syllable for the male, and a more high-pitched 'uh-hu' for the female. (Hear the call here).

Nesting: During breeding season, the male suggests some nest-sites to the female, of which she chooses one, which may be used for several years. Favourite nest sites are near rocky walls, inside crevices or caves, and even abandoned nests of other large birds. They may also nest on the ground between rocks, below fallen trees or under bushes. The clutch consists of 1-6 eggs, once a year. Incubation is done only by the female, during which she is fed at the nest by the male. Both share parental duties till about 20-24 weeks, by which time the young become independent and leave their parents' nest (or are driven out by them).

Local name: It is known as 'yerra gudla guba' in Telugu, 'badi chudi' or 'ghughu' in Hindi, and 'komban aandai' in Tamil.

Bird Humour



(From The Hindu, 07-11-2010)

For Private Circulation Only
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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 9 September 2011

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 18th September 2011, 6:30AM: Sardar Vallabhai Patel National Police Academy, Shivrampally.

ROUTE: 3 kms from the Zoo, on the Bangalore highway, towards Shamshabad airport, on the right hand side.

An unexplored area, the sprawling campus of the academy promises abundant birding. One can look forward to seeing a number of forest, as well as, ground birds.

This half-day trip promises to be a pleasant outing. Carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: WILD PARROTS OF THE WORLD

Thursday, 21st September 2011, 6PM: Vidyaranya School, opposite Secretariat.

A passion for parrots and a love of adventure - well, what better way to combine the two, than eco-tours to see wild parrots? An avid bird enthusiast from Brisbane, Australia, and the owner of www.featheredandfree.com, Tara Tuatai, has lived the dream and travelled all over the world to see parrots in their natural habitats. In her talk, she will share her personal experiences and encounters with wild parrots all over the world. She will also talk on eco-tourism and how it provides jobs for people who would otherwise be involved in the wild-caught bird trade.

Travelling to exotic destinations world-wide on a budget and living in the best eco-lodges is within most people's reach. By visiting these wonderful places you can help save wild parrots and ensure that your visit benefits the local community and research projects. Even a business trip to a major city can provide a soft adventure with a walk-in aviary that educates families about wild parrots.

Come join Tara on this unique multi-media journey from the rainforests of Peru and Australia to the mountains of South Africa to the 'Parrots of the Caribbean!'

Trip Report – Shamirpet Lake – 21st August 2011

Text: K Bharadwaj, Photos: Asif Husain

In the backdrop of the torrential downpour the previous day, I kept my fingers crossed when I woke up early on Sunday, for the visit to Shamirpet Lake. Thankfully, the skies were clear and we reached the destination by 7AM. There was a ghost of a drizzle just prior to reaching the

lake, but otherwise the skies were clear. We did not expect a large crowd for this trip and eventually there were only seven of us, like the proverbial seven sisters (and brothers too, I presume) which we got to hear and see a bit later as we moved towards the lake.



Grey Heron

After parking our vehicles, we spent some time on the road catching up on a few of the early risers, starting with Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), Ashy Prinias (*Prinia socialis*) and a few Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*). The bee-eaters were perched on the telephone wires across the road and were putting on a display for us. Asif and team who had come a little earlier chanced upon a couple of Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*) and a Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*). We saw three Coppersmith Barbets (*Megalaima haemacephala*) flitting across in the trees adjoining the road and then there was a Pied Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) on a tree a little away from the road.



Black Ibis

As we started to move towards the lake, we were stopped by a chappie on a cycle who wanted to know what we were up to. For a moment we thought we were trespassing on some private land but when we explained to him that we were birdwatchers, he was not only amused but also directed us to a freshly tilled patch of land, where we

would be able to see some foraging birds. We took his advice and deviated from the path to see this tilled land. There was not much to see except for a display by a Green Bee-eater and a pair of Indian Robins (*Saxicoloides fulicata*). We then saw a Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*) with its typical black bandit mask running along the eye. Always a pleasure to meet this bloke...reminds me of Antonio Banderas in 'The Mask of Zorro'! But it flew off before everyone could get an eyeful.

We trudged towards the lake along the perimeter fence of the deer park. The Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) were their usual noisy self and we caught ourselves saying we-didn't-do-it to their ubiquitous calls.

As we walked further, we saw a few White-browed Wagtails (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) perched on the perimeter fence. My earlier experiences have always been seeing these guys wag their tails on the ground. As we were nearing the water, we saw a pair of Lesser Whistling-ducks (*Dendrocygna javanica*).



Intermediate Egret

The water in the lake was not much to speak about. It was a bit more than what it was last year but quite sad considering the vast expanse of the lake. There were not many birds that we could see and this was a disappointment. We spotted the cormorants, herons, egrets, kingfishers, Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) and a few other waterbirds. It was a treat to watch the Pied Kingfisher's (*Ceryle rudis*) flight as always. It hovered above but did not give a dive display that we were waiting for with bated breath. And then there was the beautiful and graceful landing of the Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*).



Pied Kingfisher

We decided to head back as there was a possibility of the rains starting again. On our way back we espied a few Sykes's Crested Larks (*Galerida deva*) foraging on the ground. So perfectly camouflaged were they that we didn't realize their presence until they started scurrying. A big disappointment was that there was not a single bird of prey that we could sight. Eons ago I remember seeing a scavenger vulture at Shamirpet Lake, but I reckon human

predators have taken their toll on this beautiful water body!



Sykes's Crested Lark

As we were leaving, we thought that the next time around we should visit the other side of the lake for some better birding, and hopefully there will be more water in the lake. Well, wishful thinking never did hurt, did it?

Bird Humour



(© Rohan Chakravarty, www.greenhumour.blogspot.com)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Common Coot (*Fulica atra*)




Common Coot Adult (Left), Juvenile (Centre) and Young (Right)
(Lotus Pond, 03-04-2010)

Order: Gruiformes
Family: Rallidae
Genus: *Fulica*
Species: *F. atra*
Size: 36-42 cm

Description: The Common Coot is a member of the rail and crane bird family, the Rallidae. One of the easiest species to recognize, the common Coot is mainly black, but has a prominent white facial shield (which gave rise to the phrase 'as bald as a coot'). As it is a swimming species, the Coot has partial webbing on its feet, which also have long, strong toes which enable it to walk on leaves. The juvenile is paler in colour, with a whitish breast and lacks the white facial shield. It develops the adult black plumage when it is around 3-4 months old. The white facial shield, though, develops only around one year of age.

Behaviour: Unlike most of the Rails, which are generally very secretive, the Coot is seen swimming quite freely in open water or walking around on grasslands near water. A fairly aggressive species, it is strongly territorial during breeding season. During the non-breeding season, though, they can form large flocks, maybe because it helps in avoiding predators. It is reluctant to fly and when forced to, it runs across the water surface with much splashing before finally taking off. It also does the same (without actually flying) when moving short distances at speed during territorial disputes. Like with most Rails, its flight does not

look very strong, but it can cover surprising distances during migration. While swimming, it tends to bob its head and sometimes makes short dives for food.

An omnivore, the Common Coot takes a variety of small prey including the eggs of other water birds, besides algae, vegetation, seeds and fruit. The Coot shows a lot of variation in its feeding techniques too, feeding on land or water, sometimes upending or diving. The Coot is a noisy bird with a wide repertoire of crackling, explosive, or trumpeting calls, often given at night. (Hear the call here). 

Nesting: The Coot builds a nest of dead reeds or grasses, sometimes also using pieces of paper or plastic, near water's edge or on near-surface underwater objects. The clutch consists of around 10 eggs, sometimes 2-3 times in a season, but only a few young survive. They are frequent prey for birds like herons or gulls. Under pressure of food shortage, Coots can be very brutal to their own young. They bite young that are begging for food, repeating this until they stop begging and starve to death. At times, they may bite the young so hard that the chick is killed.

Local name: It is known as 'bolli kodi' or 'nalla bolli kodi' in Telugu, 'dasari' or 'khukul' in Hindi, 'naama kozhi' in Tamil and 'koot' in Punjabi.

For Private Circulation Only

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 10 October 2011

INDOOR MEETING: THE EAGLE ODYSSEY

Thursday, 13th October 2011, 6PM: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

A story of UK's greatest conservation successes...the dramatic and inspiring re-establishment of one of the most spectacular birds of prey, the White-tailed Sea Eagle, from extinction in the UK, back to a point where there are now dozens of breeding pairs nesting in Scotland each year. Having been persecuted to extinction in the UK in the early years of the last century, these magnificent birds, with an incredible 8 foot wingspan, are now firmly back and drawing large numbers of visitors each year to their nesting areas on the coasts and islands of North-West Scotland.

Narrated by Mike Carter, this film shows how this remarkable success was achieved and boasts some amazing footage of the birds in action, not to mention Scotland's stunningly rugged scenery. Also included are some short features:

- * A short film about Scotland's amazing wildlife
- * A short film celebrating the White-tailed Sea Eagles of Skye
- * An interactive map highlighting some of the best places to see birds of prey in Scotland
- * Additional footage of personal encounters with White-tailed Eagles

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 16th October 2011, 6:30AM: Narsapur Reserve Forest, Medak.

Spanning an area of over 30 to 40 sq km, Narsapur is one of the most popular birding spots around the city. The forest is rich in small woodland birds, woodpeckers and flycatchers. Birding in the forest and by the lake promises interesting sightings.

This half-day trip promises to be a pleasant outing. Carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

AVIAN AND EQUINE EXPERIENCES

Trip Report – National Police Academy, Shivampally –18th September 2011

M Shrivaya

It was an immense pleasure to be invited by Mr. J.V.D. Moorthy for a bird watching trip to the Sardar Vallabhai Patel National Police Academy, Shivampally.

Barsha, Deepa, Vijaya and I were the new birders on our very first outing. We headed towards the academy – which is about 3kms from the Nehru Zoological Park – at around 5.30 am, arriving there at 6.15AM. At the gate we

were told that two cars of the birdwatchers were already inside the campus.

Mr.Y.R.Nayakulu (Head Constable) escorted us into the campus where we met the first arrivals. Slowly over the next 15 minutes other cars rolled in, boosting our number to over 30. Mr. K.C.S. Reddy, Dy. Director of NPA welcomed us all and wished us a pleasant birding trip.



Photo: Asif Husain

It was a sunny, warmish kind of day with a light breeze and scattered clouds. I was delighted to meet other experienced birders, chattering away about birds. I hardly knew anything about birds and their behaviour, but was, nevertheless, very eager to join the experienced birders. After a quick introduction we divided ourselves into two groups with the intention of covering at least some part of the 2.75 acre campus. My group included Mr. Moorty, Humayun, Anjali, Nilay and others.



Pied Crested Cuckoo (Photo: Asif Husain)

As we moved on we saw a Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*) flying across, which happened to be my first bird of the day. A few minutes later I saw a bird sitting on the fencing, which flew down the undergrowth, that Humayun later identified as the Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*), the first migrant of the season. Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) were calling and very soon we saw them as they took flight. I was watching my first big flock of peafowl when Humayun alerted us to the calls of the Painted Francolin (*Francolinus pictus*) and the Grey Francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*).



Yellow-billed Babbler (Photo: Vijay Menon)

All birds are shy by nature and so, it is not always easy to see them. Paying attention to their calls helps us identify them and it also guides us to their perches. A small group of Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*) were conversing with each other and that was when we saw them. As a beginner, I tried remembering the names and calls of the birds which I saw and heard, taking down notes simultaneously. I was, then, advised to do one thing at a time – see them and enjoy the trip first, and then jot down my observations. I did just that. However, I remember the call of the Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*)! As we were moving on, we saw some warblers flitting in and out busily. I came to know the uniqueness of every bird which we came across. As we moved around munching on biscuits offered by Deepa, a Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) undulated its way overhead into the bushes.



Scaly-breasted Munia with nesting material
(Photo: Asif Husain)

We moved towards the residential part of the campus which had lots of tree cover and beautifully maintained avenues. By now the sun was getting warmer and the shade was very welcome. A Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) - which was extremely camera-shy – caught our attention. We saw that it was nesting and observed the nest from a distance, cameras clicking away. Humayun, very cautiously, approached the nest and confirmed that there were chicks in it. A bird gamboling in the tree above had us all guessing its identity. Anjali managed to get a clearer look and Humayun's camera confirmed it as the Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*).



Black Kite (Photo: Vijay Menon)

Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) and Black-eared Kites (*Milvus migrans govinda*) were soaring in the skies above us and I learnt how these birds use the warm air currents to stay afloat effortlessly. After about 3 hours of birding, we hungry birders approached the breakfast spread set beside the lovely swimming pool complex, eagerly. While enjoying the yummy and appetizing breakfast, we interacted with the former director of the academy Mr. Vijay Deoskar and the Dy. Director Mr. K.C.S. Reddy. After a group photo with the officers and staff at the academy, we drove towards Rajasthan Bhavan from where we had a bird's eye view of Hyderabad. Four small red birds flitted across our path and were immediately and excitedly identified as Red Avadavats (*Amandava*

amandava). They were nesting in a bamboo clump nearby.



Indian Grey Hornbill (Photo: Asif Husain)



Black-rumped Flameback (Photo: Asif Husain)

Mr. Moorty wanted to see the horses at the academy and thanks to Mr. K.C. S. Reddy, his wish was granted and all of us drove to the stables of the police academy across the road. Mr. K.C.S.Reddy informed us about the different breeds of horses. I was very excited to see German horses there as I am currently learning German. Mr. Subba Rao (Head Constable) allowed us to feed and touch the horses, which some of us did not-so-confidently. There was a lot of camera activity here as well!!



Photo: M Shravya

I would love to visit Sardar Vallabhai Patel National Police Academy again. On behalf of all the BSAP members, I thank the officers and the staff at the Academy for their wonderful hospitality and the warmth. Mr. Reddy rightly remarked that police people are not bad after all!

Bird watching opened up new vistas to me. I came to know a lot about birds (and horses, as well). Although the check list shows 53 species of birds, I'm sure there are many more on the campus that we missed seeing, and perhaps, there will be some more coming into the lush, green campus during the migratory season. I made many new friends and I earnestly hope lot of people take up birding as a hobby. I'm eagerly looking forward to the next birding trip. Thank you BSAP!

AROUND THE WORLD - FOR THE LOVE OF PARROTS

Talk by Tara Tuatai - Indoor Meeting – 21st September 2011

Avinandan



Tara Tuatai

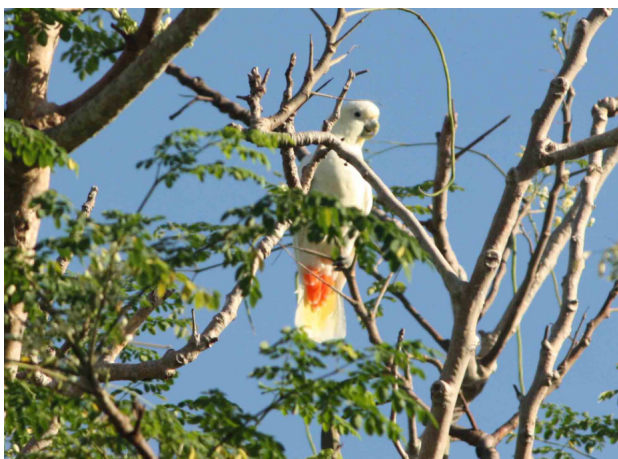
Tara Tuatai is an avid bird enthusiast with a special fondness for parrots. This common passion for the Psittaciformes led us to getting acquainted, online, on Facebook in "Save Wild Parrots" group, a few months ago. When I got to know that she was planning a trip to India and Nepal to see the parrot species of India, I was at first surprised. While parrot-centric birding/ecotourism is a big draw in recent times, the usual destinations are

Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica and Indonesia. It felt wonderful that someone was coming all the way from Australia (a land which is already rich in birds of this feather) to see India's parakeets. I thought this would be a great opportunity for her to share her experiences with BSAP and she readily agreed when asked. I immediately called up Aasheesh to find out whether I could schedule a talk for mid- September.

When we arrived at Vidyaranya School, we were pleased at the warm welcome which is so typical of BSAP members.

Tara started her talk with a brief introduction about bird-focused ecotourism, followed by why parrots are so sought after, with some breathtaking pictures of the large macaws of South America. She gave us all a glimpse into the activities of poachers and their impact on wild parrots, and the immense cruelty involved therein, which was deeply moving for the audience present, particularly the children.

She then proceeded to show why carefully managed ecotourism can transform poachers into game wardens, who actually aid in conservation, by taking us through the story of a villager in the Philippines. He, earlier, earned his livelihood by trapping the critically endangered Red-vented Corella/Phillipine Cockatoo, but had now become a game warden who supplemented his income with fishing.



Red-vented Corella / Phillipine Cockatoo

This heartwarming story was followed by the breathtaking footage of parrots gathered at a clay-lick at the Tambopata Nature Reserve in Peru, to ingest clay, which acts as a detoxicant for the birds. The footage was taken through Tara's hand-held camera. Among the myriad species of parrots gathered at the lick were the three large, mostly sympatric, species of macaws - the Red and Green, the Scarlet and the Blue and Gold; whose ecological niche separation is not yet well known to science. However, what is indisputably known is that the macaws are the Superstars of the parrot eco-tourism industry and, perhaps, lure more tourists to South America than any other species of parrots or birds.

Within a matter of seconds we were transported from the dense rainforests to the middle of the ocean – the

charming paradise of Cook Islands, where the diminutive, but absolutely splendid Rimatarua Lorikeet hangs on a thread for survival. Its photograph on a banana flower had the whole audience gaping with their mouths open, in deep awe of its unique combination of bright red, green and violet. This unique gem of a bird could have been lost due to the intense pressure it faced and continues to face from ship rats and common mynahs, both species having been introduced to this paradise by the carelessness and/or thoughtlessness of mankind.

The next few slides took us through conservation activities for this bird, which was accompanied by a vibrant Cook Island folk song, a song to which Tara had danced in a local competition, wearing a colorful lorikeet costume. Evident from all this, was Tara's passion for parrots and the fact that she does not confine herself to merely being a tourist or a twitcher with checklists, but that she actively participates in conservation activities across the world, wherever she can play a part.



Hyacinth Macaw

This was apparent from the next few slides where Tara presented some photographs of field biologists working with Hyacinth Macaws in Pantanal in South Brazil. Here researchers were providing alternate nesting sites to a species that was greatly endangered due to paucity of natural hollows. The photographs also showed how the scientists were painstakingly monitoring the health and taking measurements of the chicks, to ensure their survival.

Tara then showed us parrots which are found in her native home town - Brisbane, Australia. These slides showing charismatic Lorikeets and Rosellas and graceful Cockatoos in the suburbs of the bustling city, convinced me that the term "Terra Psittacorum" – 'The Land of Parrots', used to describe the continent of Australia, is indeed apt.

Last but, most definitely, not the least, she showed us photographs of our very own Indian parakeets, which included some beautiful shots of the Plum-headed and Alexandrine Parakeets taken in Chitwan National Park, Nepal. Despite her focus on parrots, she did manage to get some lovely photographs of the Fairy Bluebird and the Black-headed Oriole at Thattekad and a pair of Scarlet Minivets during her trip to Coorg. While she was understandably happy about having sighted the Malabar Parakeet at the Thattekad National Park in Kerala, what was astonishing was that the photographs of a parakeet which she was most gung-ho about, was that of the “common” Rose-ringed Parakeet, perched atop the spire of the Taj Mahal - ‘ruling the roost!’

She reminded us, once again, of the cruelties inflicted upon parrots in the wild and in captivity purely to fuel man’s greed, and why enjoying them in the wild is a much better proposition. I doubt if anyone in the audience disagreed.

(The writer is a life member of the Bird Watchers’ Society of Andhra Pradesh. Tara and Avinandan are involved with an international organization known as the World Parrot Trust which sponsored many of the conservation activities mentioned in the talk).

Trip Report – Appanapally Reserve Forest, Mahboobnagar District –10th September 2011

Text: Humayun Taher, KB Anand, Nilay Raha, Mahipal Rao; Photos: Humayun Taher

Fired by the many excellent reports being made on the BSAP online group about Appanapally Reserved Forest area in Mahboobnagar District, it was decided that a visit was definitely worthwhile. Accordingly, plans were quickly laid and the four of us set off at 5AM on 10th September to visit the place. After the usual pit stops for *chai* and breakfast, we reached the location at around 6.30 in the morning, which was only about 10 minutes off our estimated arrival time.

The bird took off from its perch at this point and zoomed overhead to perch on a convenient neem tree nearby. It was apparent that the bird was searching for breakfast but we could not see it swoop at anything. Meanwhile, having taken some photographs of the bird we were distracted by the little Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks (*Eremopterix grisea*) that were sporting around and one cock bird perched on a fence-post very close to us, allowing us to approach close enough to take decent photographs.



Red-headed Merlin

Parking the car at a suitable spot, we quickly shouldered our bags and binoculars and started looking around at the bird life. The first notable sighting came almost at once: Spotting a hawk-like bird perched on a telegraph pole; we at first passed it off as a Shikra. A closer look and Humayun apprised us of the fact that the bird was actually a Red-headed Merlin (*Falco chiquera*) and not a Shikra.



Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark

Having searched in vain for a quail which got up almost at Anand’s feet and zoomed off into a bush where we could not see it, we decided to walk towards a small water-body that was about a kilometre away. Anand and Mahipal, who had been to this place before, informed us that this was the best place to look for Painted Francolins and Red Turtle Doves.

We, therefore, set off passing, along the way, such interesting sights as a Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*) (which is notoriously difficult to photograph properly), sundry Babblers and Drongos and an adult female Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) sitting imperiously on top of a haystack. And then the calls of Painted Francolin (*Francolinus pictus*) started to echo through the area. Humayun, who openly confessed that this was one bird he was very keen to see, was delighted and wanted to go in search of the bird at once. Unfortunately, it was quite impossible to tell where the calls were coming from. All that we could see was that the area where the bird was calling, was in thick cover and almost impossible to reach without considerable disturbance. So we proceeded towards the marsh, consoling ourselves that there would be other places more conducive to a good sighting.

A little further along the way, we came across a Baya Weaver (female) (*Ploceus philippinus*) inspecting a nest. Now, all the literature tells us that the Baya female only comes to inspect the nest when it is in the “helmet” stage. This particular nest looked as though it had just been started. There was no shape, only a large bunch of grasses attached firmly to a twig, as the accompanying photograph shows. Yet, here was the female inspecting it. This behaviour certainly deserves more investigation. Do the females actually help in the nest building at so early a stage? Or is this just an isolated incident?

Having reached the marsh, we walked along the bund and were soon stopped by a rather unusual looking Drongo. The white cheek spot said that it was a Black Drongo; but the tail was not forked and the wings had a bronze sheen on them. Surely no Black Drongo looked like that... The books came out and a frantic discussion followed. Eventually we decided it was a Black Drongo juvenile, which lacked the forked tail. Maybe it was in moult. We later saw quite a few individuals like this one, all with the bronze sheen on the wings and the straight tail without any signs of a fork. We think these are Black Drongos (*Dicurus macrocercus*) but we are at a loss to explain the tail. More research is required here.

Painted Francolin continued to call but, try as we might, we could not get a sighting. These birds are very shy and are given to calling from a perch where they can see to a considerable distance all around. As such, they are difficult to stalk up to, unless one knows exactly where they are. Still, we continued to hope for the best. In the meantime, there were other sights to see: Red Turtle Doves (*Streptopelia tranquebarica*) were in quite decent numbers and one adult male perched obligingly close to us, allowing excellent photographs to be taken.



Red Turtle Dove

Then Nilay heard a drumming sound and thought it was a woodpecker. Anand was not quite sure but Nilay held to his argument and subsequently he was proved right. A slight movement on a dead tree nearby and we spotted a little sparrow-sized bird in typical woodpecker attitude, hopping up the branches, pausing occasionally to tap at the tree. Binoculars and cameras came into rapid action and the little Yellow-crowned Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos mahrattensis*) was not difficult to identify.

What was interesting was that the bird was not at all disturbed by our close proximity. It continued to behave quite normally, tapping away at the branch and occasionally hopping a few steps up or down and tapping away as before. It was not in the least disturbed by our quite curious antics at the foot of the tree. I think we all were delighted at the familiarity of the bird and probably clicked far more photos of this chap than we might otherwise have.



Yellow-crowned Woodpecker

While exclaiming over the Woodpecker, a White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caeruleus*) alighted on the top of the tree; but it was far more retiring than the Woodpecker and quickly flew off, alarmed at our exclamations. Having finally decided that we had taken enough footage of the woodpecker, we decided to go see what else we could. So we retraced our footsteps and went in pursuit of a Painted Francolin that appeared to be calling from very close by. Along the way we saw a female Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradise*), a couple of Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*) and a Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*). The calling Francolin was now very close and we crept up as cautiously as we could. Unfortunately, the bird was not fooled. It had seen us a long way off and knew exactly how long it could push its luck. Just as we saw it, it took off and zoomed away into the cover of the nearby bushes. A few minutes later, the calls started again from this new location!

We looked glumly at each other and then, nothing daunted, determined to try pursuit again. So it was off in the direction of a fresh call. As we went, we notched up Red-winged Bushlarks (*Mirafra erythroptera*), Indian Silverbills (*Lonchura malabarica*) and a few Yellow-eyed Babblers (*Chrysomma synense*). Eventually, having located the cover from which the bird was calling, we again commenced a careful stalk, but once more the bird saw us a few seconds before we did and again flushed into cover. The sun was now starting to get uncomfortable so we reluctantly decided to return.

Returning the way we had come, a small track branching into the bush where Mahipal remembered that they had earlier seen a pair of Bonelli's Eagles, tempted us to try again. There were no Bonelli's Eagles to see, but there was a Blue-faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*) that appeared, gamboled around a bush close by and then vanished as suddenly as it had appeared. This seemed to be about the only notable sighting in this area; although, further on we saw another of the curiously tailed Drongos that seemed to be common in these areas.



Scaly-breasted Munia

Having returned to the car, we decided to go in search of a suitable hostelry where we could have a cup of hot tea and some refreshments. Accordingly we started back, but were stopped along the way by a pair of Scaly-breasted Munias that seemed to be courting. The cock was performing a quaint little dance while the hen perched nearby and looked on admiringly. The Scaly-breasted Munias seem to be in full breeding frenzy these days; Humayun mentioned that around his office, two pairs are presently engaged in nest-building activities.



Spotted Owlet

Having refreshed ourselves with a good luncheon, we decided to return to Appanapally and visit areas where Mahipal and Anand remembered sightings of a family of Spotted Owlets (*Athene brama*) and other little birds. Accordingly we returned and found the tree which was the ancestral home of the Spotted Owlets. There were, apparently, three youngsters with the adults at present residing in this noble old Banyan. We saw the youngsters, peering curiously at us as we wandered around the tree, searching for the birds. A round face occasionally peered down at us suspiciously, but the birds kept themselves well-hidden until they had thoroughly scrutinized us and decided that we were harmless. Then they appeared out in the open and allowed us to get a good look and some excellent photos. Nearby was a small paddy field and therein solemnly stalked a couple of Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), their breeding plumage now appearing ragged and untidy. They were wary birds and did not allow close approach. A little further away, on a telegraph wire sat a small flock of Swallows. Going up to investigate, we found them to be Wire-tailed Swallows (*Hirundo smithii*). Nearby sat a solitary female Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*), and further along on the top of a telegraph pole sat a stolid looking Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*).



Black-shouldered Kite

But now the shades of evening are coming on and it is time to start thinking of returning. Accordingly, having

stopped at a very pleasant little chai shop for a refreshing cuppa, we headed back home. Along the way, we decided to take a little detour and stop at Palmakole Tank. So this halt was initiated. There was little to see as the evening was now well advanced. However, we did spot a few Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*), five Eurasian Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodea*) and a few Common Teal (*Anas crecca*) and Darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*) perched on trees in the lake. There were a few small Sandpipers and Plovers around, which we could not identify as the binoculars could not see through the gloom of the evening. However, we heard the calls of the Rain Quail (*Coturnix coromandelica*) from nearby and, just as we were thinking of returning, an early Nightjar started its calls from close by.

Refreshed and cheered by this bonanza and the calls of the Nightjar rounding up a perfect day, we headed back to the vehicle and so homewards. As to the list: well, a total of 90 species is nothing to sneeze at, even if it is a combination of two places... what say others!!!

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Purple Swampen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)



Purple Swampen Adult (Left) and Young (Right)


(Lotus Pond, 17-07-2010)

Order: Gruiformes
Family: Rallidae
Genus: *Porphyrio*
Species: *P. porphyrio*
Size: 43 cm

Description: The Purple Swampen is a large chicken-sized bird belonging to the rail family, the Rallidae. With a wide range, it is known variously as African Purple Swampen, Purple Moorhen, Purple Gallinule or Purple Coot in different parts of its distribution. From its name in French, *Taleve sultane*, it is also known as the Sultana Bird. Its bright bluish-purple plumage, red bill and frontal shield, and huge feet make it one of the easiest species to recognize. There are 13 sub-species spread across Asia, Australia, Europe and Africa. The sub-species found in India, *P. p. poliocephalus*, has cerulean-blue scapulars, face, throat and breast. The Purple Swampen has long toes which enable it to walk on leaves. It is clumsy in flight, but can still fly long distances. Given that it has feet without webbing, it is also a good swimmer. The juvenile is paler in colour.

Behaviour: While most of the Rails are generally very secretive, the Purple Swampen is seen walking around quite openly in the reeds or grass near water. It prefers

wet areas with high rainfall, swamps, lake edges and damp pastures, often living in pairs or larger communities. It can be quite an aggressive species, especially during courting. The Purple Swampen is a seasonal breeder, and the breeding season generally correlates with the peak rainfall period or, in temperate areas, with summer. It breeds in warm reed beds. The courtship ritual is elaborate, with the male holding reeds in its mouth and bowing to the female with loud chuckles. It tends to be monogamous in the western part of its range, but cooperative breeding groups are common in the eastern parts. These groups may consist of multiple females and males sharing a nest, or a male-female pair with helpers drawn from previous clutches. It may occasionally swim or make short dives for food.

The Purple Swampen mainly subsists on tender shoots and vegetable-like matter, but has been known to eat eggs, ducklings, small fish or invertebrates such as snails. They have even been known to attack eels, though it is not sure if they actually eat them. They may bring food to their mouths with one foot instead of eating it on the ground. The Purple Swampen has a loud, explosive call, sometimes described as 'a raucous, high-pitched screech', and may also emit a subdued, musical 'tuk tuk'. (Hear the call here). 

When not persecuted, the Purple Swampphen can become quite tame. Historical evidence shows that the Romans kept Purple Swampphens as decorative birds at large villas and expensive houses. In Polynesia (New Zealand and Samoa) too, the Purple Swampphen was highly regarded as a pet. Red was the prized color of Polynesian aristocracy and while birds with red plumage (such as the Red-tailed Tropicbird, some Hawaiian honeycreepers and the Maroon Shining Parrot) were highly prized, the Swampphen was unique because it derived its prestige not just from plumage but from its reddish face, beak, and legs. In old Samoa only chiefs could keep such birds as pets.

Nesting: Pairs nest in large pads of interwoven reed stems on a mass of floating debris or amongst matted reeds a little above the water level in swamps, clumps of rushes

in paddocks or long unkempt grass. Multiple females may lay eggs in one nest and share the incubation duties. The clutch of one bird would be around 3–6 speckled eggs, pale yellowish stone to reddish buff, blotched and spotted with reddish brown. A communal nest may contain up to 12 eggs. The incubation period is 23–27 days, and is performed by both sexes as well as any helpers that might be present. Chicks have downy black feathers and are able to leave the nest soon after hatching, but often remain in the nest for a few days. Young chicks are fed by their parents (and group members) for between 10–14 days, after which they begin to feed themselves.

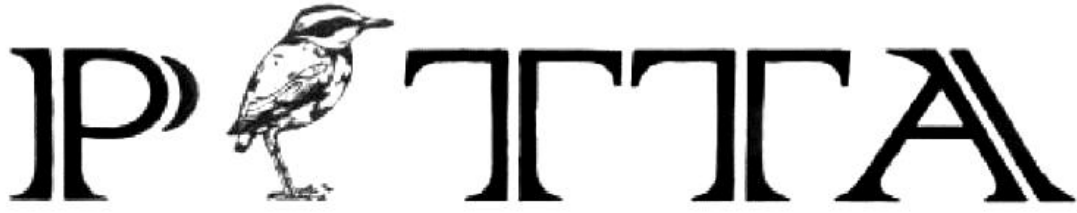
Local name: It is known as ‘Nila bolli kodi’ or ‘ooda bolli kodi’ in Telugu, ‘kaim’ or ‘jamuni vanmurghi’ in Hindi, ‘neela kozhi’ in Malayalam and ‘Nili jal-kukri’ in Punjabi.

For Private Circulation Only

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 11 November 2011

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 13th November 2011, 6:30AM: ICICI Knowledge Park, Genome Valley, Thurakapally Village.

Meeting Point: Apollo Hospital, Vikramপুরi (ahead of Secunderabad Club).

Route: 5km beyond Shamirpet Lake – Darling Cave Hotel on the left – go ahead another furlong – turn right at Circle and follow Genome Valley board for 3km – ICICI Knowledge Park signboard.

This is an area that is relatively under-birded and holds a lot of promise. One can expect to see a number of forest and ground birds, as well as some water birds, as the place is quite close to Shamirpet. Birding will be followed by breakfast.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 27th November 2011, 6:00AM: Cherlapally – Rampally Cheruvu.

Meeting Point: ECIL Crossroads, 5:45AM.

Route: Marredpally – Ramakistapuram Flyover – Neredmet – Sainikpuri - A.S. Rao Nagar - ECIL Crossroads. Alternate Route: Cross Tarnaka - left at CCMB - straight to NFC - right after railway flyover - come to a T-Junction - right again - straight on till you see the lake on the left.

Situated in the Cherlapally Industrial Area near ECIL, this water body and its surroundings abound in a large variety of avifauna. One can see a number of water birds like Ducks, Cormorants, Coots, Ibises, Herons, Waders, etc, in and around the lake. The bund separates the lake from the fields, marshes and scrub and a walk on it yields not just the regulars, but also some species that are a rarity. Many of these birds have been seen nesting here. The Cinnamon, Black and Yellow Bitterns, and the Red-necked Falcon have also been sighted here. This lush green area is relatively unexplored and quite undisturbed, making a visit mandatory.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

Trip Report – Narsapur Reserve Forest – 16th October 2011

Text: Chandrashekarani; Photos: Anand Kalinadhabhatla

The outing to Narsapur was a great surprise and revelation of the potential of BSAP activities. Around 8 cars lined up at Panjagutta filled with participants for the birding trip! It not only underlined the potential of such outings in bringing members together and initiating them into fruitful exchange of ideas and establishing sub-groups that will carry on further inputs on the avifauna of the Deccan region, it also created a firm bond among the

fraternity of birders of BSAP, inducing the need for more such trips.

The day started with an exciting sighting of a migrant, a male Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) near the temple and then Anjali came up with a keen sighting of a Changeable Hawk Eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*), perched almost a kilometer and a half on a bare branch on the opposite hill, over-looking the *nullah* that runs beneath it.



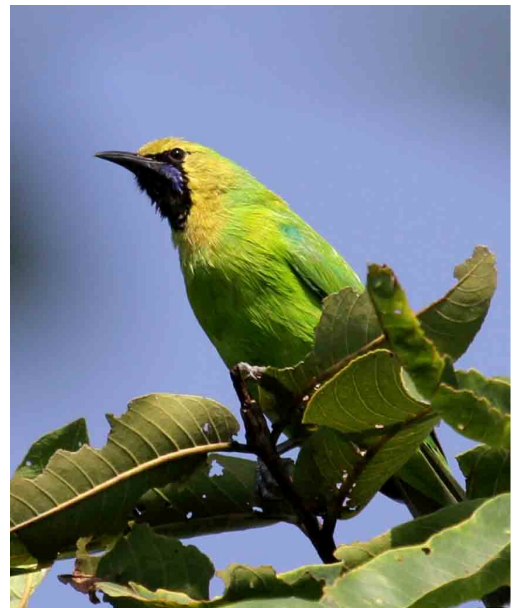
Black Redstart

The next exciting sighting was the Red Avadavat or the Red Munia (*Amandava amandava*) with whom the shutter-bugs had a field day! The hide and seek of the Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*) in the nearby thicket and its varying low calls made one joyous. The sighting of a Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) on an over-hanging branch in a stream, was equally interesting, for this diminutive bird is not frequently seen. Another migrant, the Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) darted across the stream restlessly before flying off to a less disturbed location.



Common Kingfisher

Plum-headed Parakeets (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) were flying around the motley crowd now and then, quizzically enquiring, "What's wrong with these fellows?" The Swifts flying around had a lovely nest in a dilapidated building close to the temple environs and it was tempting to spend a day sitting there and observing their marvelous technique of house-building. The Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) demanded our attention with its fluty calls. And then it was the Blue-winged Leafbird (*Chloropsis aurifrons*) that caught our attention with all its mixed calls and mimicking ability, till one had a full view of it for a brief time.



Blue-winged Leafbird

Our next halt was the lake near Narsapur town, since all wanted to see some water birds. It was not disappointing. Apart from the assorted Egrets and Indian Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*), the sighting of Black Ibises (*Pseudibis papillosa*) was interesting. A lone Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*) (a male in good colors) circling around the lake lent a great charm to the serene scene. To cap it, the Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (*Eremopterix grisea*) gave all a splendid chance to observe it at close quarters and photograph it. I regretted that it was not the breeding season, for it would have given all a memorable chance to see its magnificent breeding display.



Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (female)

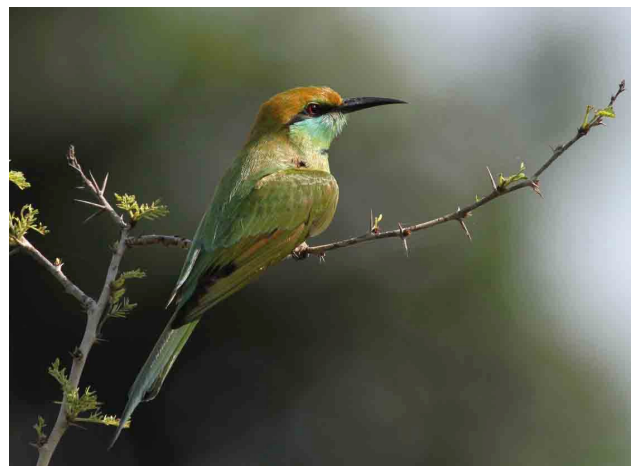
The flitting of Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*) from tree to tree and their displays was a treat to watch. Another migrant, the Blue-capped Rock Thrush (*Monticola cinclorhynchus*) was also sighted, much to the delight of all.



White-browed Wagtail



Yellow-crowned Woodpecker



Green Bee-eater

The bird-list was quite impressive, in spite of the short duration of time spent. Here, I would suggest that BSAP may consider a full day outing.

THE EAGLE ODYSSEY

Report on the Indoor Meeting – 13th October 2011

Shafaat Ulla

This is an inspiring story of one of UK's greatest conservation successes – that of the White-tailed Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*). It is one of the largest eagles in the world, with a wing span of three meters. After centuries of persecution, these eagles became extinct in the UK early last century.

It is pertinent to ask why it was persecuted. It was popularly believed that it lifted new born sheep as also human babies and this is depicted even in paintings. It was thus demonised and declared a vermin by local sheep farmers and fishing communities. It was also killed by Victorian bounty hunters as trophies. Even their nests were sought out in the high mountains and burnt by the locals. The eagles could not withstand this relentless persecution and finally the last eagle in UK was killed in 1918.

For the next fifty years nobody bothered about the absence of the eagles. Finally in 1968, the Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds (RSPB) decided to do something to bring back these magnificent birds back to the shores of Scotland. The RSPB team started a campaign to educate the locals and to dispel their misplaced beliefs about the eagle. It was pointed out that the eagles were opportunistic feeders and were doing an efficient clean up job by eating carrion and dead bodies, including that of humans. After much cajoling and convincing the locals, it was decided to bring in eagles from Norway, where a healthy population of these eagles was thriving. Therefore, four eagles were brought and released on one of Scotland's northern islands. The eagles thus brought in failed to breed, which was a big disappointment.

Another eight years passed and in 1975 RSPB, with additional funding, took up the challenge again and on a much grander scale. It was decided to bring in chicks from Norway and introduce them in Scotland, in large numbers. Normally raptors lay only two eggs and because of sibling rivalry or lack of food, normally only the older chick survives. It, therefore, made perfect sense to take away one chick from each nest, bring them back to Scotland and raise them in large open pens and release them when they were able to fly. This is exactly what RSPB did, with help of a large team of scientists and the Royal Air Force who ferried the chicks all the way from Norway to Scotland. Thus till 1984 about 80 young birds were released in the wild.

1985, success at last! One nest was discovered on the Isle of Mull. It made headlines and there was tremendous jubilation all over England. The nest naturally was monitored very closely, day and night, by a handful of scientists. Two eggs were laid and two chicks hatched. Both fledged, but one succumbed to cold. A success, nevertheless.

Till the year 2000, almost a hundred eagles had fledged and 13 breeding pairs were on record. Today the locals welcome the eagles, as tourists from all over the world are converging at Scotland and most locals are benefiting by the paying birders.

RSPB however feels that for a healthy population, there should be around 1000 breeding pairs. With the continued dedication of the RSPB staff this goal can be achieved in the near future.

Bird Humour



(From the Times of India, 24-06-2011)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)



Cattle Egret (Breeding)

(Cherlapally, 14-08-2010)

Order: Pelecaniformes

Family: Ardeidae

Genus: *Bubulcus*

Species: *B. ibis*

Size: 46-56 cm


Description: The Cattle Egret is a cosmopolitan species of heron found in the tropics, subtropics and temperate zones. Despite having plumage similar to the egrets of genus *Egretta*, the Cattle Egret is more closely related to the herons of genus *Ardea*. It was moved to its current monotypic genus *Bubulcus*, of which it is the only member, by Charles Lucien Bonaparte in 1855. Some authorities today divide it into two separate full species, the Western Cattle Egret *B. ibis* and the Eastern Cattle Egret *B. coromandus*. Some authorities even recognise a third sub-species, *B. i. seychellarum* of the Seychelles.

Its relationship with humans and their domesticated animals has ensured that the Cattle Egret is distributed across most parts of the world, even being seen as a vagrant in sub-Antarctic islands. Typically seen in fields and dry grassy habitat, it is a stocky heron, being 46-56 cm long with a wingspan of 88-96 cm. It has a relatively short and thick neck, a sturdy bill and, generally, a

hunched posture. The non-breeding adult is mainly white in plumage, with a yellow bill and greyish-yellow legs. The breeding adult develops orange-buff or golden plumes on its back, breast, crown, cheeks and throat. The bill, legs and irises also develop a bright pink-to-red flush for a short while at the height of the breeding season. The sexes are similar, but the male is slightly larger and has longer breeding plumes than the female. The juvenile has a black bill and does not have the coloured breeding plumes. Its eyes are so positioned as to allow for binocular vision during feeding, and some studies suggest that they may be capable of crepuscular or nocturnal activity. However, having adapted to feeding on land, they are said to have lost their ability to accurately correct for light refraction by water.

Behaviour: The Cattle Egret is most commonly observed around cattle and other large grazing animals (including elephant, rhinoceros, etc) and usually feeds by catching small insects or other creatures disturbed by them. Studies have shown that success can be up to four times higher when foraging with cattle than otherwise; the same happens when the Cattle Egret follows farm machinery, but it has to move around more in this case.

It may weakly defend the area around a grazing animal against other egrets, but when there are too many, it may just move elsewhere. If there are several large animals present, the Cattle Egret prefers to forage around animals that move 5-15 steps a minute. Dominant birds feed closer to host animals and so obtain more food. Its perceived role as a biocontrol of cattle parasites like ticks and flies makes it popular with farmers.

It is known to feed on a wide range of prey, especially insects like grasshoppers, crickets, flies and moths, as well as spiders, frogs and earthworms. On islands with seabird colonies, Cattle Egrets are known to prey on eggs and chicks of terns and other seabirds. During migration they have been known to eat tired migrating birds, and sometimes also indulge in kleptoparasitism, chasing the chicks of seabirds and forcing them to disgorge food. The Cattle Egret has a quiet, throaty '*rick-rack*' call at the breeding colony, but otherwise is largely silent. (Hear the call here). 

Nesting: The Cattle Egret nests in colonies, found often around bodies of water but more commonly in woodlands near lakes or rivers, in swamps, or on small inland or coastal islands. These colonies are sometimes shared with other wetland birds like herons, egrets, ibises and cormorants. In India, nesting begins with the onset of monsoons in May. The male displays in a tree using a range of ritualised behaviours such as shaking a twig and sky-pointing (raising bill vertically upwards), and the pair forms over 3-4 days. A new mate is chosen in each season and when re-nesting following nest failure. The nest is a small untidy platform of sticks in a tree or shrub constructed by both parents. Sticks are collected by the male and arranged by the female, and stick-stealing is common. The clutch consists of 1-5 oval-shaped pale bluish-white eggs.

Local name: It is known as '*Surkhia*', '*Badami*' or '*Gai bagla*' in Hindi and '*Samti kongra*' in Telugu.

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 8 Number 12 November 2012

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 25th December 2011: Pocharam.

Meeting Point: Hyderabad Central, Punjagutta, 6:00 AM.

Pocharam is a large reservoir on the Manjira River, about 70km downstream from Manjira Barrage. The reservoir is situated amidst undulating hills, with dry deciduous forest and scrub jungle. The lake varies in extent from 15,000 to 20,000 ha depending upon the season and fluctuations in rainfall. The lake is known to support a wide variety of resident, as well as migratory waterfowl. More than 50 species of waterfowl are listed for the area. Specialities include Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill and Bar-headed Goose.

Members are requested to be on time as it is a long, two-hour drive. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

Trip Report – ICICI Knowledge Park – 13th November 2011

Jayati Mitra



Photo: Vijay Sirdesai

It was a foggy morning as we headed towards the ICICI Knowledge Park, a part of the Genome Valley Project. On the way we saw Shamirpet Lake and, as we drove towards our destination, Grey Francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) greeted us near the sprawling campus covering an area of 200 acres. It was a pleasant sight for all the birders who had gathered there.

As we walked along the main path we noticed the rows of Indian Cork Tree in full bloom with the sweet-scented

white flowers. Gradually, we reached the boundary wall across which a River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*) was sitting on the edge of a distant water body, showing its yellow beak and grey plumage. We turned towards the other side and strolled along the narrow path leading towards the bushes. We were guided by bird calls and soon spotted the Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*) and many others.



White-breasted Kingfisher (Photo: Vijay Sirdesai)

As we crossed over towards the open field we were delighted to see two White-breasted Kingfishers (*Halcyon smymensis*) flying, with their blue wings glowing in the sun. One of them perched on a tree and we could observe its white breast closely. Suddenly our attention was drawn towards the sky. A Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) flapped its black-tipped white wings slowly and rhythmically and glided down atop a tree. It held onto the delicate swaying branch with its sharp claws, wagging its tail up and down alternately to maintain its balance. It sat still with its red eyes focused on the ground, giving an excellent opportunity to our photographers to capture it. Its patience was soon rewarded as we watched it dive down for its prey. Having got it, it disappeared into the sky.



Black-shouldered Kite (Photo: Asif Husain)



Brown Shrike (Photo: Vijay Sirdesai)

We looked towards the distant trees and identified a Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) by observing the black stripe across its eye. As it flew, its brown wings and off-white breast was noticeable. It was interesting to watch one Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) fly into the air and chase a flock of Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*), and try to attack one of them.



Purple-rumped Sunbird (Photo: Asif Husain)

By this time we were quite exhausted and returned indoors where we were invited to a delicious breakfast. As we were leaving we saw a pair of Indian Robins (*Saxicoloides fulicata*) hopping beneath a bush, thus exposing the reddish-brown spot underneath the tail.

Quite a few Purple Sunbirds (*Nectarinia asiatica*) were whistling on top of a tree, amidst which one Pale-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*), with its short pale pink bill was also noticed. But the most delightful sight was that of the Dusky Crag Martins (*Hirundo concolor*) with grayish-brown wings, circling overhead in a typical swallow-like manner. The birds were busy trying to find a place under the leaves for nesting, and they often clung onto the straight, vertical wall comfortably, while resting.

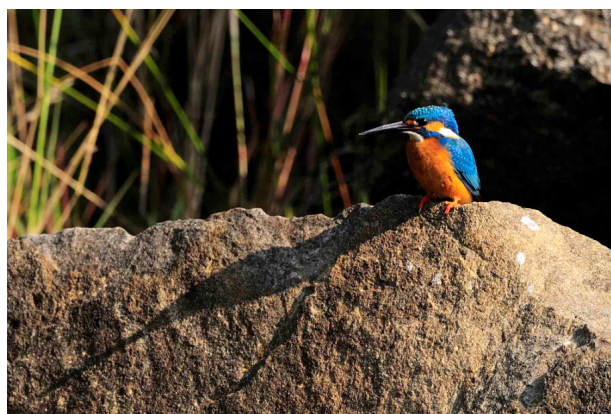


Dusky Crag Martin (Photo: Vijay Sirdesai)



Pied Crested Cuckoo (Juvenile) (Photo: Asif Husain)

We went out of the gate and some of the birders walked towards the lake. A Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) and a Common Hawk Cuckoo or Brainfever Bird (*Hierococcyx varius*) were sighted. A Short-toed Snake Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) was gliding high in the sky with its white belly flanked by its brown wings. A Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) was spotted near the water.



Common Kingfisher (Photo: Vijay Sirdesai)

Soon, it was time to return home. We left after thanking our host Mr. Prasad for an immensely enjoyable morning in their campus.

Trip Report – HITEX Lake – 24th October 2011

Bindu M

On 23rd October, I received an SMS from Humayunbhai: “Planning a quick trip tomorrow morning to HITEX LAKE in the city. Interested let me know...” I immediately responded with a “YES”.

I remember having read about this newly discovered place near the HITEX in the PITTA-May 2011 article, recording good population of Waterfowl. The plan was to check the current demography of the birds dwelling there.

The next day, we started for Hitex Lake at 9.30 in the morning from Humayunbhai's place. En route, we found a tea stall near the HICC gate where we halted for a cup of *chai*. To our delight, we spotted a pair of House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) hopping around on the asbestos roof.

As we headed towards the lake, from a distance, we could see it completely filled with reeds and a dozen Lesser Whistling Ducks (*Dendrocygna javanica*), a Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and a Common Coot (*Fulica atra*). We quickly parked the vehicle in the shade and, approaching the lake, spotted two to three flocks of 15-25 Lesser Whistling Ducks, a pair of Common Coot and an Intermediate Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*). Upon careful observation, we could see a large number of Lesser Whistling Ducks hidden in the reeds as well. (They are called Whistling Ducks as they make a prolonged whistling sound while flapping their wings in flight). As one flock took flight to the other side of the lake, the other flocks followed.

We noticed a pair of Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) hovering around the lake for a while and then coming to rest on a rock nearby. A Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) was also observed in flight, on the other side of the lake.

Further along, we spotted around 5-6 Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), along with 5-6 Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*); amongst them all was a winter visitor, a lone female Garganey (*Anas*

querquedula). Further up, we saw a pair of Purple Herons (*Ardea purpurea*) fly on to the top of a tree. By the water, we saw a lone Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) fishing for its meal, a White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) and three Indian Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*).

As we went towards the other side of the lake, we spotted around 20-30 Spot-billed Ducks along with Little Grebes, another group of Lesser Whistling Ducks and a Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*).

When compared with the last visit to the lake in May 2011 by Shafaat Uncle, Humayunbhai *et al*, a large portion of the green water was now choked with tall grass and reeds. There was a notable decrease in the total number of Spot-billed Ducks (from 250 to 30) and Common Coot (from 50 to 2). Although the number of Lesser Whistling Ducks had also declined from 250 to 150, they still continue to be the dominant species there and have outnumbered the populations of the other birds using the lake.

Other birds seen included Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*), Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopaceus*), Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), Spotted Dove (*Spilopelia chinensis*), Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*), Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*) and White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smymensis*).

BIRDS ON A SUNDAY

Trip Report – Cherlapally / Rampally Cheruvu – 27th November 2011

Surekha Aitabathula

What kind of people are unafraid to get up early in the morning? Birdwatchers. Because they know that the winged denizens of the woods present themselves in full glory in the early morning hours. About twenty of us left the warm comfort of our beds and cheerfully converged at Cherlapally, located about 20 km away from Hyderabad. It seemed to me that none in this group wanted to laze back at home on a Sunday. All displayed a freshness and sense of anticipation for the thrill of birding! We greeted old friends, introduced ourselves to the newcomers and started climbing the bund along the edge of the lake.

The first bird I saw was the River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*). This bird, with a deep yellow bill, forked tail and short red legs, was spotted flying above the lake which meant it was definitely trying to fix breakfast. The Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) is always a delight to watch. The speckled and barred jet black and white colors on this small bird

flashed and glinted as it fervently hovered over the water. The hovering is so akin to a helicopter! Whoever invented the helicopter must have been a birdwatcher.

Another member of the "Fisheries Department" is the White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smymensis*) which I seem to spot on almost every one of my birding trips of late. I love its brief description in Dr Salim Ali's 'The Book of Indian Birds' which says – "A conspicuous white shirt front and white wing patch in flight diagnostic". Further description says – "A brilliant turquoise blue kingfisher with deep chocolate brown head, neck and underparts, a conspicuous white 'shirt front' and long, heavy, pointed red bill". Reading about its incredible colour scheme itself was so interesting; to actually see the contrasting colour brilliance is a feast for the eye. A small colourful fish eater with a bill that seems incongruously longer than its body!



Green Bee-eater (Photo: Nupur Banerjee)

As we moved along the bund, we spotted the usual suspects by the water and in the open scrub, like the Common Coot (*Fulica atra*), Little (*Egretta garzetta*) and Intermediate Egrets (*Mesophoyx intermedia*), Purple (*Ardea purpurea*) and Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*), assorted Cormorants, Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*), Blue Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*), Large Grey Babblers (*Turdoides malcolmi*), Spotted (*Streptopelia chinensis*) and Laughing Doves (*Streptopelia senegalensis*), various Drongos, Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*), House Crows (*Corvus splendens*), Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*), Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) and Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*).



Asian Openbill (Photo: Mahipal)

An Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) flew right above our heads giving us a clear view of the fascinating gap in its long bill.



Rosy Starling (Photo: Mahipal)

Another exciting bit was the spotting of Rosy Starling (*Stumus roseus*). As soon as I set my eyes on these beauties, I was transported to Jamnagar in Gujarat. This is where all the BSAP members who had attended the World Bird Conference, were privy to watching several flying 'clouds' of Rosy Starlings. Each cloud would have easily contained 500 or even a thousand birds! Oh! the thrill of watching a thousand Rosy Starlings change direction *en masse* while in flight, alternately flashing bright pink and black to us!

We were happy to spot more than 50 Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*) sitting still on twin bushes – mere brown specks in the distance. Their colours and features became obvious only when they suddenly flew up together in an arc. The Bayas can never escape the gaze of the world because their neat, hanging nests are a dead giveaway.

The birds that I eagerly seek out in every trip are the raptors. I was not disappointed. We saw a Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*). Again I love reading its description in Salim Ali's book. Here it goes – "*Our commonest raptor. A confirmed commensal of man usually found in the neighborhood of human habitations, whether populated city or outlying hamlet. Remarkably adroit on the wing, turning and twisting and banking and stooping to scoop up scraps from a traffic-congested thoroughfare and avoiding tangles of overhead telephones and electric wires with masterful ease*".



Black Kite (Photo: Deepu Valathara)

Another raptor we spotted was the Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*). This was the first time I saw this handsome dark-brown raptor. Being a raptor fan, I was all too happy to add another name to my 'Raptors Seen' list.



Pied Bushchat (Photo: Mahipal)

We saw a pair of Pied Bushchats (*Saxicola caprata*) on a wall. The male looked more beautiful, in jet black with white patches on the rump, abdomen and wings. The female is earth brown. Bird books denote its feeding behaviour as sitting on an exposed perch and darting down to the ground to pick up insect prey. This is exactly what we saw in Cherlapally. The pair sat for a long time and kept darting down to feed, so we got to watch them closely.

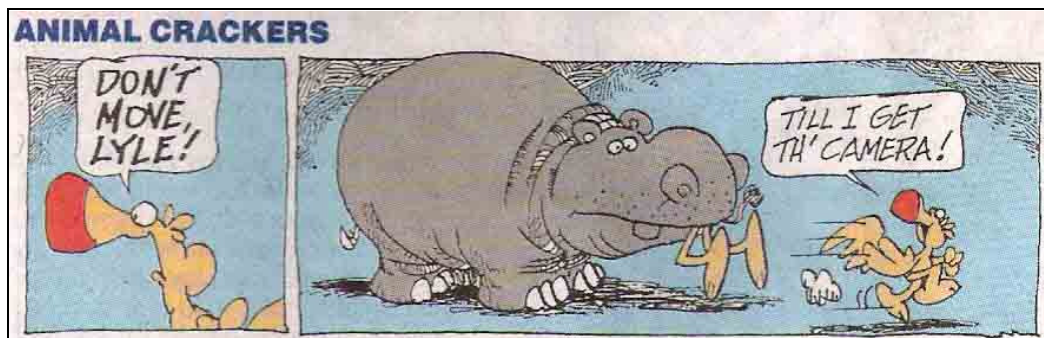


Little Grebe (Photo: Mahipal)

When I take in the beauty of birds and their behaviour at close quarters, I realise that Nature's theatre is the most priceless and gets the maximum encores!

Bird Humour

This time, a humorous take on photographers!



(From the Times of India, 06-02-2010)

Bird of the Month
Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*)



Little Cormorant (Cherlapally, 13-08-2010)

Order: Pelecaniformes
Family: Phalacrocoracidae
Genus: *Phalacrocorax*
Species: *P. niger*
Size: 55 cm

Description: The Little Cormorant is the smallest of the Cormorants. It is described by Salim Ali as a "glistening black duck-like water bird with a longish stiff tail and slender compressed bill sharply hooked at the tail". In breeding season, it undergoes a lot of changes – feathers turn from black to grey, the gular pouch becomes paler on its margins, a short occipital crest and black bristles develop on either side of the beak and eyelashes, and a white triangular patch appears on the head.

Behaviour: The Little Cormorant is a resident bird in most parts of tropical South Asia, dwelling the year around in trees near a water source. It is often seen sitting on a rock or tree branch with its wings spread. Its diet consists almost exclusively of fish; flocks of cormorants exhibit group hunting, driving the fish inshore by beating the water with their wings and gradually closing in on their prey. Being foot-propelled, it is well-adapted to foraging in shallow waters. The typical foraging pattern consists of a series of dives in from the water surface, alternating

with rest breaks. The pauses and the duration of the dives vary depending on many factors such as water depth, tide level, type of fish present, etc. The Little Cormorant breeds between May and October. Breeding takes place in the trees, generally in mixed company along with Egrets and Darters. The breeding display can be quite elaborate, with the tail spread, the neck drawn back till the nape almost touches the back, and the bill pointing upward; sometimes the head is thrown forward in hammer-like strokes and the head and neck feathers fluffed out.

Nesting: The Little Cormorant may use a variety of plants to build its nest. It prefers the dry twigs from the plant, the entire dried plant, or the stem; less often, it may also use dry fruit, leaves or plant fibre. Both sexes participate in the nest-building process. Nests are cup-like with a small central depression where the eggs are laid. The clutch consists of 2-6 eggs, which are initially white to bluish-white in colour but slowly turn browner as incubation progresses. Eggs are round at one end and relatively pointed at the other. Incubation duties are handled by both parents.

Local name: It is known as 'neeti kaki' or 'chimna neeti kaki' in Telugu, 'paan-kauva' in Hindi and 'laghu jal kak' in Sanskrit.

For Private Circulation Only

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